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EQUIPPING FAMILY MEMBERS TO FULFILL THEIR BIBLICAL
ROLES TO THE GLORY OF GOD AT WALNUT STREET
BAPTIST CHURCH IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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EQUIPPING FAMILY MEMBERS TO FULFILL THEIR BIBLICAL
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I dedicate this ministry project to the love of my life, Jessica. You have supported and encouraged me greatly on this journey.

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PREFACE

From the bottom of my heart I want to thank my wife, Jessica. When it comes to marriage and the family, selfless sacrifice, and unconditional love, no one has more impact and influence on my life than she. She is the one who encourages, motivates, and teaches me more than anyone else in my life.

I want to thank our wonderful children, Madelyn and Noah, for their support and understanding on this journey. They inspire me to be a better husband and father.

I want to say thank you to Walnut Street Baptist Church for the privilege of serving as their pastor. Their graciousness, understanding, and support have been deeply meaningful to our family.

I also want to thank my parents, Donnie and Teresa Williams, for their nurture, support, and encouragement in my life.

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I want to thank my professors, in particular Dr. Hershael York, who supervised me through this process. His insight and pastoral heart have guided me on this journey.

Mark T. Williams

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

God desires the earthly family to be a reflection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When every family member is functioning as God intended, the family becomes a beautiful picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and brings glory to God. The harsh reality, however, is that many families fall short of the picture God desires. With divorce, single-parent homes, domestic violence, verbal abuse, and drug and alcohol addiction ravaging the family today, it has become a marred image of the family God established. The family must be equipped by the Creator and Designer in order to reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ the way He intended.

Context

Walnut Street Baptist Church (WSBC) in Louisville, Kentucky, was founded in 1815. The church is located in inner-city Louisville in a community known as Old Louisville. While Walnut Street is rich in history, it is a fellowship that has been declining for the last decade. Once a prominent church with strong families, it is now experiencing significant decline and the disintegration of the family. Negligence prevails concerning individual family roles.

This ministry project was relevant for WSBC for many reasons, the first of which is theological. The implementation of this project sought to help the church begin the process of shifting to a biblical model of leadership. In order to address leadership roles within the church itself, attention first must be given to the God-given roles within the family. As the roles within the family are addressed, concentration can later be given to the roles within the church.

The ministry-project need became apparent at WSBC in 2014. The church had no formal statement of faith and was driven theologically by whoever occupied the pulpit. The problem was that each pastor had a different theological view regarding the roles of men and women. In an effort to rectify this problem and have the church affirm basic biblical doctrine, WSBC's ministry team led the church to adopt a statement of faith called the "Affirmations." During forum discussions with the congregation, a lack of biblical understanding concerning the roles of men and women within the church and the family became apparent. Heated debates took place in the forum meetings that demonstrated a lack of leadership on the part of husbands and fathers. Men's inability to lead resulted in a lack of willingness to follow and nurture on the part of women and mothers. Additionally, lack of leadership created confusion with the children.

While the church was persuaded by Scripture to adopt a biblical statement on the family, WSBC still does not have a correct biblical view of the leadership structure of the church. Although the church holds to the biblical view of the family on paper, that understanding has not worked itself out practically among all the people. This project, therefore, was vital to WSBC's being able to live out its statement of faith practically. As this project took root in the hearts of people through sound doctrine it would strategically make the biblical argument for the leadership structure of the church. Once the church began to understand and implement the biblical roles of each family member, WSBC would begin to see how the church is to be led.

This project was also relevant to WSBC for historical reasons. Somewhere along the line in the life of WSBC, it shifted from a biblical view of the family. While it is unclear exactly when this change took place, the church was seeing the bitter fruit of decades of indifference to the Bible's clear teaching on the family and the church. Men were not leading their families as they ought by protecting, instructing, and providing for them. They were not loving their wives as Christ loves the church. They were not present

in the lives of their children as they should have been. As a result, women had assumed the role of men in many areas. Power or prestige was not the motive on the part of women; rather, men were not taking seriously their role in the family. Leadership and authority in the church is not an equality issue, but rather a biblical issue. When a church begins to compromise on clear biblical teaching, there is no limit when it comes to heresy.

This project was also relevant for WSBC's children and student ministries. Behavioral issues in the children and student ministries had become a weekly occurrence. Because of a limited authority structure in the home, defiance was prevalent in regard to submitting to authority in the church. The children and students had never been taught their role in the family and did not understand their responsibility to obey their parents. The behavioral issues that were present at church were a direct reflection of the home. If individual homes were strengthened, children and student ministries would become stronger.

Discipleship, as much as possible, must take place within the home. When homes are biblically strong, the church will be biblically strong. The main issue at WSBC was many single-parent and broken families needed to understand that they could be a picture of the gospel as well. All hope was not lost. Single-parent families needed to be encouraged; even though their family structure was not what they desired, they could still fulfill their God-given role and responsibility.

Finally, this project was relevant for practical reasons. Many husbands, wives, children, and parents desired to understand their role and responsibility in the family; however, they simply did not know how. This project helped the members of each family fulfill their roles and responsibilities. This was not a mere academic exercise to fulfill a requirement; it should have a practical and lasting effect on the life of WSBC.

Rationale

Earthly families are to be reflections of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When each family member is fulfilling his or her God-given role and responsibility within the family unit, that family becomes a beautiful picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ and brings glory to God. This ministry project was vital to the health of Walnut Street Baptist Church and its future as a New Testament church for three reasons.

First, because of past moderate theology, the church had an unbiblical view of men and women. Not only prevalent in the church's leadership structure, this view had also affected individual families within the church. WSBC's church leadership issues were a direct result of an unbiblical view of the family. Men were neglecting to fulfill their God-given role as the spiritual leader in the home and in the church. They were not loving their wives as Christ loves his church. Women were serving in various positions, but they were serving in ways they have been taught are acceptable without biblical guidance. Women at WSBC had not consistently seen loving leadership in men and had been made to believe that their role is inferior and the only service that matters is service that is seen. Children were also rebelling against godly authority. Some of this rebellion was because they were young and unsaved. However, some parents were not taking seriously their God-given responsibility to train their children. WSBC was taught the biblical view of men and women as set forth in Scripture.

Second, this project was vital for the purpose of evangelism and discipleship. Discipleship should take place within the family. When the world sees the Christian family it should see a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those outside the body of Christ should witness husbands loving their wives as Christ loves His church and wives respecting their husbands as to the Lord. They should observe children submitting to authority as well as parents instructing their children. Followers of Christ often lose credibility in evangelistic and discipleship efforts when their actions do not match their profession.

Third, this project was vital because it impacted every family at WSBC. When instruction was complete and practical steps were taken, everyone benefited from this project as each family member learned to fulfill his God-given role within his individual family. This project served as a springboard that enabled the staff of WSBC to begin addressing matters of the leadership structure currently established within the church.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen each family member by teaching biblical family roles and responsibilities at Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

Goals

The following three goals were designed to accomplish the purpose of equipping each family member to fulfill their God-given roles and responsibilities:

1. The first goal was to assess accurately WSBC's understanding of the family and the individual roles of each family member.
2. The second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the family from Colossians 3:18-21 that increased the knowledge of the biblical view of the family among WSBC members.
3. The third goal was to observe the families of WSBC affirming the biblical principles of the family through their increased knowledge.

Research Methodology

This project had three goals that were attainable and edifying for the members of WSBC. The first goal was to assess each person's understanding of the family as a whole as well as each person's individual role within the family. A survey was distributed to twenty-two members of the congregation that revealed their biblical comprehension of the family prior to this project.¹ This goal was considered successful

¹ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee

when twenty-two individuals completed the survey.

A second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the family from Colossians 3:18-21 that would increase the knowledge of the biblical view of the family among WSBC members. In order for husbands, wives, and parents to fulfill their roles, they needed to understand what their biblical role was and be able to focus on their roles individually. This goal was measured by the pastoral staff and select lay leaders of WSBC who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.² This goal was considered successful when a minimum of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The final goal of this project was to observe the families of WSBC affirming the biblical principles of the family through their knowledge. They needed to understand that when a husband, wife, children, and parents all fulfill their biblical role, that family is a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ and brings honor and glory to God. This goal was measured by administering an end of project survey that was compared to the initial assessment survey.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a statistically significant difference occurred in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Complementarian. Wayne Grudem, biblical scholar and theologian, defines “complementarian” as “the view that God created man and woman equal in value and personhood, and equal in bearing His image, but that both creation and redemption indicate some distinct roles for men and women in marriage and in the church.”⁴ For the

prior to use in the ministry project.

² See appendix 2.

³ See appendix 1.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids:

purpose of this project, “complementarian” refers to men and women being created equal but given different roles within the family.

Egalitarian. The term “egalitarian” refers to a system of thought that denies the unique differences in roles and responsibilities of men and women in the church and in the family. Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Ronald Pierce state, “Gender, in and of itself, neither privileges nor curtails one’s ability to be used to advance the kingdom or to glorify God in any dimension of ministry, mission, society or family.”⁵ Egalitarianism recognizes patterns of authority in the family, church and society, but rejects the notion that any office, ministry or opportunity should be denied anyone on the basis of gender alone.⁶ For the purpose of this project, the term “egalitarian” refers to a school of thought which asserts no legitimate difference between men and women in the home and church.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of all surveys was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of the family and each family member’s role. In order to minimize the negative effects of this limitation, the respondents were guaranteed that their answers would remain anonymous. They were given a four-digit number so that survey comparisons could be made. Second, the effectiveness of the preaching and training sessions was limited by the consistency of attendance. If the participants did not attend all of the preaching and training sessions, it would be difficult to measure the effectiveness of the material. To minimize this limitation, prior to the initial survey, each respondent committed to attend all preaching sessions. If respondents had to be absent for a preaching session, they had the opportunity to watch the recorded session at their leisure.

Zondervan, 1994), 16.

⁵ Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementary without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 13.

⁶ Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 13.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, this project was limited to twenty-one weeks, which included pre-assessment, development of sermons, and post assessment. While the preaching process concluded in twenty-one weeks, the effects of this ministry project would be ongoing. Second, a sampling of twenty-two congregants were selected, ranging from 25 to 90 years old.

Conclusion

As each family member recognizes how God designed the family to reflect His glory, each member of the family will more effectively picture the Gospel of Jesus Christ to an unbelieving world. Human beings were created to bring glory to God. My prayer was that the Lord would change the hearts and understanding of the congregants so that the sole purpose of the family was to bring glory to Him. As God changes individuals, they would realize the importance of their family as a whole and their responsibility within their family. Focus begins in obedience to Colossians 3:18-21 where one sees God's perfect design for the family which results in His glory.

CHAPTER 2

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FAMILY

God created every human being on this planet to glorify Him. For this reason, He desires His own family to reflect His glory. Romans 11:36 says, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.”¹ God has the same purpose for every created entity, including the family. The Lord’s purpose is that each family will reflect His glory. In fact, God created this world with His family in mind. Ephesians 1:5 says, “he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” When individuals obey God’s Word, they bring Him glory.

Jesus Christ’s purpose was to be obedient to the work the Father had given Him to accomplish while on earth. Christ prioritized the glory of God when He said in John 17:4, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” The Son of God’s obedience brought His Father glory. In a similar way, each member of an earthly family fulfills his God-given responsibility when he/she obediently carries out the role the Father has assigned him within the family. As each member of the family carries out his/her unique role, he/she brings glory to the Father. God’s plan has never changed; His ideal has always been what is seen in Colossians 3:18-21. The picture the Lord intended to put before the world is a picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Contrary to the cultural shift in the view of the family, Colossians 3:18-21 teaches that

¹ All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

each member of the family is to be a reflection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bring glory to God.

Colossians is a Christocentric letter in that it is further instruction of what Jesus taught and modeled in His life. Situated in the heart of the letter, Colossians 3:18-21 is saturated with this Christ-dominant theme, which includes multiple expressions related to the Lord. According to Charles Talbert, distinguished Professor of Religion at Baylor University, “those expressions in Colossians include ‘fearing the Lord’ (3:22); ‘work . . . as for the Lord’ (3:23-24); ‘from the Lord . . . you will receive’ (3:24); ‘you also have a master in heaven’ (4:1).”² These phrases indicate that even the daily duties of believers are to be brought under the Lordship of Christ. Those actions are performed to and for the Lord, regardless of other purposes they may also serve.³ The idea is that the daily activities of believers do not just serve their own needs and demands; rather, believers are glorifying their Father while living their daily life.

In addition to this Christocentric theme, the instructions given in Colossians suggest they are meant to be an ongoing behavior in the life of the family. According to Jerry Sumney and Jennifer Cox, “These household codes are in the present imperative, thus suggesting that the writer intends these commands to be a continuing part of the way each person relates to the others within the family.”⁴ As a result, these behaviors are to become characteristics of each family member’s interaction within the household. Colossians 3:18-21 addresses each family member’s responsibility that, when fulfilled, reflects the Gospel of Jesus Christ and showcases the glory of God.

² Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians, Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 233-34.

³ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 233-34.

⁴ Jerry L. Sumney and Jennifer K. Cox, *Colossians; A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 241.

A Wife Glorifies God by Voluntarily Submitting to Her Husband's Leadership

Colossians 3:18 states, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." God designed the family so that every family member has a role to carry out for His glory. God's mandate for the wife includes voluntary submission to her husband's leadership. A wife glorifies God when she fulfills this God-given role.

Issues Related to Submission

In spite of its straightforward clarity, Paul's simple statement has been widely challenged throughout history. Many argue Paul's instruction to wives is not Spirit-inspired but reflects his chauvinistic attitude toward women. Others insist that Paul's teaching on authority and submission were cultural and does not apply to society today.⁵ Regardless of its clear instruction, Colossians 3:18 has been the subject of widespread debate throughout history because of Paul's use of the word "submission."

Some contend Paul's use of "submission" implicates the wife as inferior. In Greco-Roman culture, wives were expected to submit to the husband's authority in all things that related to the way the household was perceived from the outside. The wife even adopted the husband's gods and taught the children about those gods and other spiritual powers. Even though she had significant authority within the household in relation to servants and others who worked for the household, a wife usually remained under the legal authority of her husband.⁶

Furthermore, in almost forty New Testament occurrences, the verb "submit" carries an overtone of authority and subjection or submission. However, "Paul's usage of the middle voice (the subject is part or all of the action) does not convey the notion of

⁵ John MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 167.

⁶ Jerry L Sumney and Jennifer K Cox, *Colossians: A Commentary, New Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 241.

inferior dignity.”⁷ In essence, submission does not imply inferiority. Galatians 3:28 clearly affirms that spiritually there is no difference between male and female. In fact, Jesus submitted Himself to the Father during His life on earth, yet He was in no way inferior to Him. Believing this command implies the wife as having an inferior role is a misunderstanding of this passage. Both husbands and wives must recognize the term has nothing to do with personal worth and value. Richard Melick, Senior New Testament Professor at Gateway Seminary, concludes that “Paul is describing a functional situation which reflects God’s plan for families on earth. He was not speaking ontologically, that is, regarding the essence of personhood. Differences of roles to accomplish specific functions do not call for the categories of superior and inferior.”⁸

Others have the misconception that Paul’s use of the word “submission” includes absolute obedience. John MacArthur rightly contends that

submission is not absolute. Obedience in this text is reserved for children and servants. There may be times when a wife must refuse to submit to her husband’s desires (if they violate God’s Word). In every marital context, the husband’s authority is not to be exercised in a dictatorial, overbearing manner. The wife’s submission takes place in the context of a loving relationship.⁹

Furthermore, the latter half of verse 18 clarifies a common misunderstanding found in Ephesians 5:22. The phrase “as to the Lord” sometimes bears the interpretation that the wife’s relationship to her husband is to be modeled after her relationship to the Lord. Thus, a husband may claim the wife must obey him totally in the same way that she does the Lord. Conversely, some wives claim the phrase means that they submit to their husbands only when their husbands act like the Lord. Both of these interpretations miss

⁷ Constantine R Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 62.

⁸ Richard R Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 312.

⁹ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 168.

Paul's point. Melick, again, concludes that "submission is a matter of Christian commitment. Coming with salvation, it is a matter of a wife's relationship to the Lord, not to her husband."¹⁰ It is "fitting in the Lord" (Col 3:18).

Others advocate that Paul is making a case for mutual submission. This concept is brought to fruition based on Ephesians 5:21-22—"submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." While that idea contains an important relational principle of mutual consideration, the text speaks against mutual submission. Ephesians 5:21 introduces domestic relationships by the participle form of the verb "submit."¹¹ Submission is essential evidence of being filled with the Spirit. As the text develops, however, only three of the six listed receive the command to submit: wives, children, and servants. Richard Melick concurs that the husband submits to the wife by loving her and caring for her needs, but Paul did not specifically call that submission. Ephesians 5:21-22 needs clarification, and that occurs in Colossians 3:18. Paul directly called upon the wives to submit, and the text does not use the word in relation to the husband at all.¹²

The Wife and Voluntary Submission

"Submit yourselves" is a term used in military contexts of a subordinate's relationship to his superior in the army hierarchy.¹³ Paul used the word *hypotasso*, which means "to order accordingly, to join below, to subjugate oneself."¹⁴ "This verb is a middle present imperative, signifying the wives should voluntarily subject themselves to

¹⁰ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 312.

¹¹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 311.

¹² Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 311.

¹³ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon: Helps for Translators* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 92.

¹⁴ Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke, and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, 34b (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 433.

their husbands.”¹⁵ This verb has the concept of putting oneself under willingly, not by compulsion. The term is used in Luke 2:51 to refer to Jesus’ subjection to His parents and in Luke 10:17, 20 to describe demons being subject to the disciples.¹⁶

The submission Paul details here is not that of the servant or of a doormat. The equality of men and women before the Lord, of which Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, has not been retracted.¹⁷ Moreover, Paul is not suggesting that a woman is naturally or spiritually inferior to the man or the wife to the husband. Paul, however, does mention elsewhere that there is a divinely instituted hierarchy in the order of creation, and in this order, the wife follows that of her husband (1 Cor 11:3, 7-9).¹⁸ The argument for the subordination of wives, according to Peter O’Brien, is made more explicit in Ephesians 5:23-24, “For the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”¹⁹

The word “submit” occurs thirty-eight times in the New Testament, twenty-three of them used by Paul. When this term is used, it can denote a forcible “subjecting,” as when evil spiritual beings are “subjected” to the authority of God or Christ (Luke 10:17, 20; 1 Pet 3:22) or when God “subjects” all things to Christ (1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; Phil 3:21) or when God, because of humanity’s fall into sin, puts creation in “subjection” (Rom 8:20).²⁰ Particularly characteristic of New Testament usage are exhortations to

¹⁵ David W. Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 262.

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 168.

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon, An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, vol. 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 147-48.

¹⁸ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 222.

¹⁹ O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 222.

²⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 299.

voluntarily put oneself under the authority or direction of someone or something else. Examples of voluntary submission include all believers to God (Heb 12:9; Jas 4:7) or to His law (Rom 8:7); the church to Christ (Eph 5:24); Jews to God's righteousness (Rom 10:3); humans to governing authorities (Rom 13:1, 5; Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:13); Christians to their leaders (1 Cor 16:16); servants to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18); young men to older men (1 Pet 5:5); children to their parents (Luke 2:51); and wives to their husbands (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1,5).²¹

When analyzing the verb's usage ("submit"), there seems to be a difference in the specific nuance of the term according to the voice in which it occurs (active or middle voice). When it occurs in the active voice, the power to subject belongs to God Himself. This is evidenced in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 (Christ subjecting all things). In the middle voice, it describes Christ's submission to God (1 Cor 15:58), church members to one another (Eph 5:21), believers submitting in the exercise of their prophetic gifts (1 Cor 14:32), or the proper order for wives (Eph 5:22). In the context of Colossians, "submit" does not suggest slavery or servitude, and certainly never calls for the husband to make his wife submit.²² An additional matter to note is that in each passage, the wife's submission is different from the others. Children and servants are told to obey; the wife is not. Submission is voluntarily assuming a particular role because doing so is right. Obedience is not directly commanded. Submission demands obedience as a pattern, but there are times in which obedience to a husband may become disobedience to God.²³

The motivation for voluntary submission is that it is a proper Christian attitude. This is indicated by the second half of Colossians 3:18: "As is fitting in the Lord." The word "fitting" has the idea of proper as a duty. By employing the statement, Paul made it

²¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 299-300.

²² Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 311.

²³ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 312.

clear that such submission is an outworking of the Lordship of Christ.²⁴ The Lord determines what is fitting or not. This qualification recasts the wife's submission to her husband by turning into allegiance shown to Christ.²⁵ Paul is reminding believers of the centrality of the Lordship of Christ. The concept Paul is communicating is that the wife should submit in a manner that is appropriate for those who are in the Lord. This clause points to Christ as the pattern of humility and submission.²⁶

A Husband Glorifies God by Loving His Wife Unconditionally

Colossians 3:19 says, "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." Several sections of the New Testament run parallel with this passage, namely, Ephesians 5:22-6:9, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Titus 2:1-10, and 1 Peter 2:13-3:7.²⁷ In Ephesians 5:22-33, theological direction and rationale are clearly seen, but neither is given in Colossians 3:19 regarding the husband. However, imperative instructions are clearly communicated, addressing the husband's responsibility within the family. Christ is the pattern and model for the husband to imitate in the marriage relationship.

The Husband and Self-Sacrifice

Paul used a word for love that was rarely used in the culture of that day. The word *agapao* is the distinctly Christian word for a sacrificial, self-giving love whose model is Christ Himself. The present tense of the imperative indicates continuous action. The verb itself seems best understood in the New Testament to convey a willingness to

²⁴ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 312.

²⁵ David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 244.

²⁶ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 267.

²⁷ Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 128.

love, not the love of passion or emotion, but the love of the will – a covenant kind of love.²⁸ Peter O’Brien notes “this love is not simply a matter of affectionate feeling or sexual attraction; rather, it involves the husband’s unceasing care and loving service for his wife’s entire well-being.”²⁹ Perhaps significantly, the only other occurrence of the word “love” in Colossians refers to God’s love for us, His people (3:12). Paul urges believers to “put on love” (3:14) as the people loved by God. Now Paul applies this requirement specifically to the husbands.³⁰ Additionally, the word Paul used for love is the same word John used for love in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world.” How does a believer know that God loves him the way He says He loves him? John 3:16 concludes, “that he gave his only Son.” Christians know God loves them because He sacrificed His own son to pay for their sin. The type of love Paul is talking about is the love that Jesus Christ has shown for the church.

The simple, positive command is to love. It was common, of course, for husbands to love their wives sexually, but Paul is advocating much more than that. In his description of the husband’s love in Ephesians 5:22, he clearly articulates that the husband is to love his wife sacrificially. Her inner beauty is to be his delight, and he must be willing to do whatever he can to promote her personal well-being and satisfaction. The model for this self-sacrificing love is Christ Himself.³¹ This imitation of Christ’s love should be made manifest in the marital relationship.³² In the Christological model, this love is to be defined by the will and action of the one who is willing to consider the other

²⁸ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 168-69.

²⁹ O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 223.

³⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 303.

³¹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 313.

³² Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 267-68.

as the object of one's affection.³³

To love one's wife, therefore, will most often mean to put her interests ahead of the husband's.³⁴ Agape love is a love of the will. It is not a love of passion that dies when the physical attraction dies. This love refuses to die. The love that existed from the start of the marriage is to continue throughout the marriage.³⁵ This command reveals that Paul is not writing to highlight the authority and rights of husbands, which everyone took for granted. Instead, he reminds husbands of their obligations "in the Lord." Most in the ancient world did not expect a marriage to be grounded in love and self-sacrifice. The command is clear – husbands are to love their wives in a self-sacrificing way.³⁶

The Husband and Loving Leadership

Not only is the husband commanded to love his wife in a self-sacrificing way, but he is also to provide loving leadership in the home. The last half of Colossians 3:19 states, "and do not be harsh with them." The word "harsh" can be translated "stop being bitter" or "do not have the habit of being bitter."³⁷ The verb occurs elsewhere in the New Testament with only a physical sense: water (Rev 8:11) or the stomach (Rev 10:9-10) is turned bitter or sour. The corresponding noun is used four times, in each case condemning an attitude of bitterness (Acts 8:23; Rom 3:14; Eph 4:31; Heb 12:15), while the adjective occurs twice, once with reference to "bitter" water (Jas 3:11) and once modifying "envy" (Jas 3:14). Words from the Greek root of the word used here occur in other Greek writings to refer to rulership that is domineering and harsh.³⁸ Douglas Moo,

³³ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 268.

³⁴ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 304.

³⁵ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 168-69.

³⁶ Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 244.

³⁷ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 169.

³⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 303.

professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, asserts that “Paul is most likely reflecting this tradition, urging husbands not to act with a heart of bitterness toward their wives.”³⁹

Husbands are not to display harshness of temper or resentment toward their wives by irritating or exasperating them. Nineteenth-century theologian T. K. Abbott concludes that “the word ‘harsh’ implies a lasting temper.”⁴⁰ Rather, husbands are to provide loving leadership in the home. As stated earlier, if the love of one’s wife reflects the general, glorious love that Christ has for His people, the bitterness that some may show to their wives will reflect the rejection of that love.⁴¹

In a Christian marriage, the husband knows himself to be dearly loved by God (3:12) and commanded to love his wife in the same way. He is not to domineer his rights over his wife, but his love, which means he never thinks in terms of rights, and he is always willing to forego them.⁴² This interpretation rules out any overbearing, tyrannical, or intimidating behavior toward the wife. Paul recognizes that if bitterness is allowed to taint the relationship between husband and wife, the whole household will suffer.⁴³

Paul adds another helpful note in 1 Corinthians 7:33-34 when he calls for a mutual concern in marriage. The husband is to seek to find how he may please his wife, and the wife is to pursue how she may please her husband. Though there are ordained principles of authority and submission by God’s design, there are also spiritual equalities and mutual longings for each partner to please the other. The woman most pleases the

³⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 303.

⁴⁰ Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 293.

⁴¹ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 268.

⁴² Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 245.

⁴³ Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 245.

man with voluntary submission, while the man pleases the wife with unconditional love and leadership.⁴⁴

Children Glorify God by Obeying Their Parents

Colossians 3:20 addresses the responsibility of children in the home:

“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this pleases the Lord.” Paul used the word *tekna* (children) as he addressed their primary responsibility within the family. This general term for children is not limited to any specific age group.⁴⁵ The question must be raised, “What kind of children does Paul have in mind?” The Greek word used here (*teknon*), much like our English word “children,” can refer to almost any age group. The ancient household would often have included adult, and even married, children, so it is possible that Paul’s exhortation applies to children of any age. On the other hand, the comparable text in Ephesians, after urging children to obey their parents, requires that fathers “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (6:4). The context of Colossians 3 suggests that the concern is with young children.⁴⁶

Richard Melick concurs that Paul was addressing young children here. Two factors inform his conclusion. First, the use of the term “children” rather than “young men” shows Paul was addressing younger children. Second, in Ephesians 6:4, fathers were told to “bring them up.” The training process involved teaching children how to obey, and those who heard these words would respond properly. Nothing in the text suggests a specific age for the children. The assumption is, according to Melick, that these children were at home and under the parents’ supervision.⁴⁷ Peter O’Brien agrees

⁴⁴ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 170.

⁴⁵ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 170.

⁴⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 304.

⁴⁷ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 314.

with this conclusion because “the nominative case with the definite article is used for the vocative, which probably refers to children who are growing up and are still subject to their parents rather than those who have already grown up.”⁴⁸ This command is addressing any child of any parent who still lives in the home and is under the guidance, authority, and provision of that parent.

A Command to Obey Parents

The parallel text in Ephesians 6:1 is almost identical, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” In both Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20, Paul commanded children to obey. The word “obey” (*hypakouo*) is stronger than the word “submit,” used of wives earlier. Obedience to parents was expected of children. John MacArthur notes that “the present tense of the imperative *hypakouete* (be obedient) demands continuous obedience.”⁴⁹

In the time of the New Testament, children were legally regarded as their father’s property.⁵⁰ This command would not have been unusual in that day. Children were expected to remain obedient to their parents throughout their lifetime. The literature of that period indicates that fathers possessed great power over their children, even after the children became adults.⁵¹ The injunction to children, like that to servants, is put more strongly than the one to wives. While the “admonition to the wife was expressed in the middle voice, suggesting voluntary submission, the admonitions to children and servants are in the active imperative denoting absolute obedience.”⁵²

⁴⁸ O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 224.

⁴⁹ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 170.

⁵⁰ Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 246.

⁵¹ Sumney, *Colossians*, 244.

⁵² O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 224.

Children are told in Colossians 3:20 to obey their parents “in all things.” Paul reflects both Greco-Roman mores and the biblical commandment that children honor their fathers and mothers. While “all things” may at first seem to leave children vulnerable to abusive or overbearing parents, Marianne Thompson, professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, asserts that “there is always an escape clause implicit in such apparently global commands. No one could be expected to obey any command which compelled violation of the law of God.”⁵³ David Pao, professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, also agrees that in light of the Old Testament teachings and the reference to “the Lord” in the second half of this verse, “in everything” undoubtedly refers to the teachings of parents that are consistent with the law of God.⁵⁴ This command assumes that parents will not demand anything unseemly from their children. The command also takes for granted that the parents have the best interest of their children at heart.⁵⁵ The only limit placed on children’s obedience to their parents is a parent demanding something contrary to God’s law.⁵⁶ As with every family member, the child’s independent relationship with the Lord surpasses the relationship with parents. As with the husband and wife, Christ’s obedience to His Father in all things serves as the model.⁵⁷ When children are living under the protection of their parents, they are expected to obey their parents. But when children are no longer under the protection and care of their parents, while deference and honor are still appropriate, obedience is no longer

⁵³ Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians & Philemon*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 94.

⁵⁴ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 269.

⁵⁵ Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 246.

⁵⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 170.

⁵⁷ Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 246.

necessary to be expected.⁵⁸

A Child's Obedience Pleases the Lord

Paul goes on to say in Colossians 3:20, “for this pleases the Lord.” As with each family member, Paul again stresses the Christian motivation. This complicated phrase requires much consideration. According to David Pao, several attempts have been made to understand this phrase in its context. First, in light of the presumably absent dative reference, some have supplied an additional phrase that points to Christ as the object of the pleasing act, with an additional reference to those who are united with Him: “for such behavior pleases the Lord and befits those who belong to Him.” Second, agreeing with the first statement that an additional phrase needs to be inserted, some have insisted that God should be the object of the act of pleasing instead: “well-pleasing (to God) in the Lord (Jesus Christ).” Third, another option considers this a conditional construction, limiting the call to be obedient “in everything” – provided that the children’s obedience is only a truly Christian level of motive. Finally, the phrase can be read simply in the sense of a dative construction: “For this is well-pleasing to the Lord” or “for this pleases the Lord.” Pao concludes that the last option is the most likely reading. In light of the direct references to “the Lord” in Paul’s address to the wives (v. 18) and to the servants (v. 22), it seems best to retain “in the Lord” as a reference to the Lord Jesus.⁵⁹

Additionally, the word “pleases” almost always describes the relationship with the Lord. It conveys the thought of “well-pleasing.” “In the Lord” could be read “since you are in the Lord.” It calls the child to remember the state of grace and the responsibilities that grow from it. To be pleasing to the Lord as Christians, children

⁵⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 305.

⁵⁹ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 269-70.

should obey their parents.⁶⁰

The command for children to honor and obey their parents is taught repeatedly in Scripture. It appears in the Ten Commandments: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Exod 20:12). Jerry Sumney, professor of the New Testament at Lexington Theological Seminary, concurs that Paul supports this command with the assertion that such obedience is “pleasing in the Lord” and most likely draws on the commandment to honor one’s parents.⁶¹ Moreover, this phrase not only justifies Paul’s call for the children to obey their parents, but this use of the Christological title also redirects the attention to Jesus, who is the true Lord of all.⁶² Children’s obedience to their parents demonstrates appropriate behavior within the community that acknowledges Christ as Lord.⁶³

Parents Glorify God by Equipping and Encouraging Their Children

Colossians 3:21 reads, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” In the Lord, parents have a mutual responsibility to their children. The command in the first half of Colossians 3:21 is followed by the practical reason for the command. Paul used the term “fathers” when addressing the parents. Marianne Thompson believes that although some translations render verse 21 as “Parents, do not provoke your children,” it is more likely that Paul is speaking to fathers here since they had particular rights over their children in Roman society.⁶⁴ Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida, two New Testament scholars, also agree that verse 21 is “addressing only the

⁶⁰ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 314-15.

⁶¹ Sumney, *Colossians*, 244-45.

⁶² Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 270.

⁶³ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 94.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *Colossians & Philemon*, 94.

fathers because the more common word for “parents” is used in verse 20 and not in verse 21.”⁶⁵

A closer inspection of the Greek word for fathers (*pateres*) reveals that this word can refer to both parents, as in Hebrews 11:23, “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents (*pateres*), because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”⁶⁶ When the word “father” is used as plural it can designate both parents (father and mother).⁶⁷ This term may easily encompass both father and mother, but it also served to remind them that the fathers bore primary responsibility for the children in the home.⁶⁸ Paul’s use of this word may reflect the cultural setting in which fathers possessed the greater power and authority over their children.⁶⁹ As head of the household, the man would have had primary responsibility for issuing orders to the children.⁷⁰

While primarily addressing the father in Colossians 3:21, it is possible Paul would have both parents in view. Fathers are addressed in Colossians because they were the ones who had ultimate authority over children in the ancient household. But since in the modern family, mothers often appropriately take equal responsibility for rearing children (and, indeed, in many families are the only parental authority), it is entirely valid to apply this verse to both fathers and mothers.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Bratcher and Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 94.

⁶⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 306.

⁶⁷ Barth, Blanke, and Beck, *Colossians*, 443.

⁶⁸ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 315.

⁶⁹ Sumney, *Colossians*, 245.

⁷⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 306.

⁷¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 306.

Parental Equipping

The first half of Colossians 3:21 states, “Fathers, do not provoke your children.” In the New Testament, the verb *erethizo*, used here, otherwise occurs only in 2 Corinthians 9:2, where it is used in a positive sense with the meaning “to stimulate.” This word also has the idea of “making resentful” or “making someone bitter.”⁷² Here in Colossians, on the contrary, it designates something negative.⁷³ The situation envisioned seems to be that of the father constantly correcting and reprimanding the child for every little wrong or imagined wrong.⁷⁴ This word speaks of irritation or even nagging. Parents provoke their children by constantly picking at them, perhaps refusing to acknowledge their efforts.⁷⁵ This constant nagging or belittling of a child is the refusal to allow children to be people in their own right instead of carbon copies of their parents or their parents’ fantasy.⁷⁶ This admonition is roughly parallel to what Paul has said to husbands in verse 19. As wives submit to their husbands, their husbands are not to “be harsh” with them; so here, as children obey their parents, their parents are not to “provoke” them.⁷⁷ Paul, in effect, is exhorting parents to rear their children in such a way that they do their utmost to avoid provoking a rebellious attitude in them.⁷⁸ Paul focuses on the responsibility of the fathers in assuring the character of their children.⁷⁹ Parents can take the heart out of their children by provoking them and failing to equip them lovingly in the ways of the Lord.

⁷² Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 270.

⁷³ Barth, Blanke, and Beck, *Colossians*, 443.

⁷⁴ Bratcher and Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 94.

⁷⁵ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians*, 315.

⁷⁶ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 148.

⁷⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 306-7.

⁷⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 307.

⁷⁹ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 270.

John MacArthur lists ten ways parents can provoke their children and cause them to lose heart. First, parents can provoke their children by overprotection. Overprotective parents seldom allow their children any liberty. They have strict rules about everything. This can lead to rebellion. Second, parents can provoke their children by showing favoritism. Third, parents provoke their children by depreciating their worth. Many children have been convinced that what they do and feel are not important. When children perceive a sense of worthlessness in their homes, they conclude that they are not significant. Fourth, parents provoke their children by setting unrealistic goals. Parents can do that by never rewarding them, or never letting them feel they have succeeded. Fifth, parents provoke their children by failing to show affection. Sixth, some parents provoke their children by not providing for them. Seventh, parents provoke their children by a lack of standards, which is the flip side of overprotection. When parents fail to discipline or discipline inconsistently, children are left on their own. Eighth, parents provoke their children by criticism. Ninth, parents provoke their children by neglect; they need to be involved in their children's lives. Finally, parents who abuse their children, either verbally, emotionally, or physically, provoke their children with excessive discipline. Parents often say things to their children they would never say to anyone else.⁸⁰ Ephesians 6:4 says, "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Not provoking their children is essential if parents are going to equip their children and fulfill their God-given role within the home.

Parental Encouragement

Paul concludes the section on the family by saying in Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Both Ephesians and Colossians present two sides of the issue. In Ephesians, Paul exhorts the parents to

⁸⁰ MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 171-73.

rear their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This suggests a positive. In Colossians, Paul warns parents not to discourage their children. Especially in the child-rearing process, fathers are to embody Christian principles and remember the equality of all persons in Christ. In God's sight, children and parents have equal worth, and parents are to treat their children with respect as persons.⁸¹

The word "discouraged" (*athymeo*) refers to the state of becoming "disheartened to the extent of loss of motivation." Grammatically, this is a purpose clause that modifies the previous call to the fathers, but in this context, it also provides the basis for the previous call.⁸² In the New Testament, this word is found only in the book of Colossians. The verb is translated "discourage," but that translation can be misunderstood as pointing simply to one's emotional state without implications on the actions to be carried out.⁸³ Paul does not want to see the children of Christian families provoked to such an extent that they "become discouraged" and simply give up trying to please their parents.⁸⁴ This text reflects a situation in which a child feels that he/she can never do anything right and gives up trying.⁸⁵

Children can lose heart and become discouraged very easily. The reason for the command was to avoid discouragement. Fathers are to obey the injunction so that their children do not become discouraged.⁸⁶ Constant nagging produces a situation where children are discouraged either because they cannot please those they love or because

⁸¹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 315.

⁸² Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 271.

⁸³ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 271.

⁸⁴ Moo, *the Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 307.

⁸⁵ Bratcher and Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 94.

⁸⁶ O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 226.

they feel they are of no worth to anybody.⁸⁷ Paul points to the likely result that the parents' provocation will lead to a child's state of being dispirited.⁸⁸ Here Paul points to the child's point of view and feelings. The apostle worries more about the discouraged child, the one who is so bowed down that he or she is broken. He knows the danger that the one invested with the final word "in everything" may misuse that authority in destructive ways. His concern is not that children will grow up to disgrace the father by their disobedience, but that the father will hinder the nurturing of his children through discipline at all costs. Parents are to discipline their children in ways that will encourage and guide them into courageous and hopeful living.⁸⁹ "The parents' duty is, in effect, to live out the gospel to the child: that is, to assure their children that they are loved and accepted and valued for who they are, not for who they ought to be, should have been, or might become (if only they would try a little harder)."⁹⁰

Conclusion

The Creator of the universe and everything in it has designed the family to reflect His glory. When a husband, a wife, a child, and a parent fulfill their responsibilities in the home, they showcase the glory of God to an unbelieving world. As husbands love their wives unconditionally, they present a picture of Christ's love for His church. As wives voluntarily submit to the loving leadership of their husbands, they teach their children how to be under authority; they are modeling Christ, who voluntarily submitted to the will of the Father. As children obey their parents, they are modeling Christ, who obeyed His Father in all things. As parents equip and encourage their

⁸⁷ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 315.

⁸⁸ Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 271.

⁸⁹ Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 267.

⁹⁰ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 149.

children, they are modeling Christ, who gently and lovingly leads His people day by day. As each family member fulfills his/her God-given role and responsibility in the home, that family reflects the glory of God.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL ISSUES IMPACTING THE TRADITIONAL BIBLICAL FAMILY

God's desire is for every family to reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ and display His glory. Each family member has a role to fulfill in the home so that the Gospel is showcased, and God's glory is displayed. However, there is little doubt that the culture has shifted regarding the way it views the family.¹ In today's culture, individuals are waiting longer to get married, divorce has become prevalent, and the culture has attempted to redefine the family altogether. Though God's design for the family is clear in Scripture, families today must address the pressing cultural issues impacting the traditional biblical family.

A Biblical Understanding of Singleness and Dating

Unbiblical assumptions and presuppositions are made in many circles concerning singleness and dating. The view of many, Christians and non-Christians alike, has drastically impacted the family in today's culture. Singleness can be good and right in the eyes of God. It is not a sin to be single any more than it is a sin to be married. Many singles are viewed as the 5th wheel or less than those who are married. Biblically, this is completely untrue. Some see marriage as an eventual milestone one reaches after first "experiencing life."² For these advocates, marriage, if an option at all, is to be pursued

¹ Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 171.

² Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker, *The Gospel and Marriage*, The Gospel for Life Series (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2017), 69.

after the plan of one's ambitions and dreams has been established.³ Men and women are waiting longer to get married. This way of living minimizes the sacred unity of biblical marriage and opens the door for sexual immorality. On the other end of the spectrum, an underlying assumption is that it is more Christian to be married than it is to be single. John Piper states, "there are Christ-exalting ways to be married, and there are Christ-exalting ways to be single."⁴ A biblical understanding of singleness will help believers value the worth of the individual and uphold the sacred bond of marriage.

Biblical Singleness is a Gift from God and a Means for Service to God

Some of the greatest men in the Bible were single. A quick perusal of Scripture shows that Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Jeremiah, Paul, and many others were single men. As a matter of fact, the Bible is very positive about singleness. Jesus Himself was single, and this is very significant. He was the most fully human and complete person who ever lived. His singleness in no way minimized His humanity. He was not less of a person for it. There is nothing wrong with being single; in fact, there are many things right about being single. Just as marriage is beautiful, singleness is beautiful. God made them both. Both are designed, like all of nature, to display the glory of Christ.⁵

In 1 Corinthians 7:7, Paul speaks of being single as a "gift from God." Most certainly, this is to be understood alongside the gift of being married. Singleness is not just the absence of marriage but is a good and blessed thing in and of itself. Each state (married and single) has its own ups and downs, opportunities and challenges, griefs, and joys.⁶ Marriage, for all its blessings, is not intrinsic to being whole and fully realized as a

³ Moore and Walker, *The Gospel and Marriage*, 69.

⁴ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 120.

⁵ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 120.

⁶ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible and*

person.⁷

Paul continues to say in 1 Corinthians 7:7, “I wish that all were as I myself am.” In other words, Paul was single. He did not really have a desire to get married. He speaks of the gift of singleness by saying, “But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” Paul was saying that singleness, long-term, is a gift. Every person is born single. But it is a gift from God to stay single. There are people who have the gift of singleness, and there are people who do not. This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said in Matthew 19:12, “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

Additionally, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:9, “But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” When a person seeks to be married, knowing that as a single he or she would “burn with passion,” it does not have to mean that marriage becomes only a channel for the sex drive. Paul would never mean that in view of all the magnificent things he said about marriage in Ephesians 5.⁸ According to pastor theologian John Piper, when a person marries, he takes sexual desire, and he does the same thing with it that every person must do with all his physical desires if he would make them a means of worship: (1) bring his desires into conformity to God’s Word; (2) subordinate his desires to a higher pattern of love and care; (3) transpose the music of physical pleasure into the music of spiritual worship; (4) listen for the echoes of God’s goodness in every nerve; (5) seek to double his pleasure by making his wife’s joy his joy; and (6) give thanks to God from the bottom of his heart

Same-Sex Attraction (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2013), 52.

⁷ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 52.

⁸ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 120-21.

because he knows and feels that he never deserved one minute of this pleasure.⁹

Singleness does not diminish the worth of an individual, nor is marriage a mere channel for the sexual drive. Rather, singleness is good and right in the sight of God. It is a gift from God.

In addition to being a gift from God, singleness is also a means for service to God. The Bible mentions many advantages of singleness. “The reasons vary as to why someone would be single long-term (as Jesus Himself acknowledges with the eunuchs in Matthew 19), but in each case, it can be a means of blessing, both to oneself and to others.”¹⁰ Paul says what is obvious: that the single person is spared certain “troubles in this life” (1 Cor 7:28). Marital and family life can be extremely difficult. Many time-and energy-sapping responsibilities are present for a married Christian and parent.¹¹ Along with the advantages, certain opportunities are provided for a single person. The single person is less divided in his devotion to God (1 Cor 7:32-35). In all the complexity of family life, a person can be pulled in so many different directions at once. But for a single Christian, it might be more focused. Service and ministry can be approached wholeheartedly.¹²

The single person, in many ways, may be able to serve the Lord more easily than a married person. For example, if one is single and he is terminated from his job, he doesn't have to worry about a wife to feed or children to take care of. Additionally, singles do not have the expenses of married people. The apostle Paul was pointing to the fact that a single person can be singularly focused in many respects, but a married person has to be multi-focused. Sam Allberry contends that “single people often have a greater

⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 121.

¹⁰ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 52.

¹¹ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 52.

¹² Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 53.

opportunity for friendship, greater flexibility of lifestyle, and freedom to serve in a greater range of ministries than might be possible for a married person.”¹³

Those who are single are provided a multiplicity of opportunities, including deepening and expressing their devotion to God. Far from being a shackle, singleness can be a wonderful blessing, both to the single person and to others.¹⁴ The history of the local church is filled with lifelong singles who have been a tremendous blessing to God’s people. “Many singles advance the gospel through missionary activity, others through local church ministry, and others through faithful friendship and support to others. It is an honor to be used by God in such a way.”¹⁵ Singleness is a gift from God and a means for service to God.

Biblical Dating Is Intended to Lead Toward Marriage

Long-term singleness can be a gift from God. The strong majority of singles, however, desire to be married. As they become interested in a particular person of the opposite sex, they enter into a dating or courting relationship. The church must point dating Christian couples toward marriage. “If a dating relationship does not have a plan and has no intention to head to the wedding altar, it needs to proceed very cautiously- or be dissolved altogether- rather than waste the time, emotions, and affections on something temporary.”¹⁶ God gave marriage to be a permanent relationship. A prolonged dating or engaged season increases sexual temptation because both the man and woman are attracted to one another. Understanding the biblical principles of dating will guard

¹³ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 53.

¹⁴ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 54.

¹⁵ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 54

¹⁶ Moore and Walker, *The Gospel and Marriage*, 71.

against sexual temptation.¹⁷

When a man and woman decide to enter into a dating relationship, several factors present themselves for consideration. The Bible has much to say about relationships and marriage. Many couples today are seeking compatibility in their relationship. “While this is something to consider, the Bible says nothing of compatibility as either the initial or sustaining criteria for Christian marriage.”¹⁸ At the same time, the Bible doesn’t say it is wrong to pursue someone who shares dimensions of compatibility. Scripture’s silence on the subject makes it a matter of wisdom.¹⁹ While the Bible does not mention compatibility as a criterion for dating or marriage, it does often speak of Christian couples complementing each other (Gen 2:18). “For a couple to complement one another, there must be differences to reconcile, incompleteness to complete, and incompatibilities to overcome.”²⁰ Moreover, Christian couples must understand that their true compatibility is found in Christ—not in shared activities, similar likes and dislikes, or common personality traits. It is the Gospel and their identity in Christ that ultimately make them compatible. On the flip side, two people who love Christ can also love each other, no matter what their differences.²¹ It should also be noted that real-world romance often commences in friendship as two people get to know each other on some level before expressing romantic interest.²²

As a couple prepares for marriage, each should be clear about certain aspects of the other person in the dating relationship. Each must gather the facts and learn as

¹⁷ Moore and Walker, *The Gospel and Marriage*, 71.

¹⁸ John MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong: A Biblical Response to Today’s Most Controversial Issues* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2009), 31.

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 31.

²⁰ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 31.

²¹ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 32.

²² MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 35.

much about his/her potential mate as possible. Each needs to know the good and the bad. No question is out of bounds or off-limits. “If a potential husband or wife holds back information and becomes secretive about various aspects of his or her life, warning bells should start ringing immediately.”²³ Danny Akin, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, lists several crucial questions a couple should consider before entering marriage. These questions are simple but probing, and they help a couple understand each other and make wise preparation for marriage.

The first question a person should ask his or her potential mate is, “Are you transparent in your actions?” Every word and every action should be carefully weighed until the time of the ceremony. One cannot have too much information when it comes to this important decision. The most important decision a person will ever make is whether to trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The second most important decision is whom to marry.²⁴ God prioritizes the condition of the heart over externals. “Evaluation of a potential spouse should first be based upon character.”²⁵

According to Akin, the second question a couple must ask of each other is, “Are you tender with your words?”²⁶ The tone in which a person says something is as vital as what he/she says. A couple should listen for praise in each other, not keeping their thoughts to themselves. A man must not assume a woman knows how he feels- he has to tell her. A couple must listen for particulars. The man must understand the way to a woman’s heart is often in the details, the little things. Successful relationships require biblical modes of communication. Biblical communication includes communicating

²³ Daniel Akin, *God on Sex: The Creator’s Ideas About Love, Intimacy and Marriage* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 80.

²⁴ Akin, *God on Sex*, 81.

²⁵ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 37.

²⁶ Akin, *God on Sex*, 84-86.

verbally, honestly, regularly, and purposefully. The key to successful communication is humility.²⁷

Akin believes a third question a couple must ask before entering marriage is, “Are you unwavering in your commitment?”²⁸ A couple must be determined and tenacious in their commitment to each other. Trouble is usually in the small things. Issues such as role responsibility, conflict resolution, goals, expectations, finances, sex, spiritual compatibility, interpersonal compatibility, social compatibility, and in-law relations do not just naturally work in a relationship. They must be addressed and worked through on an ongoing basis if a marriage is to grow and develop.²⁹ True biblical love involves self-sacrifice and commitment. “Christian love imitates God’s love for us, which is an unconditional commitment to imperfect people.”³⁰

The fourth question a couple must ask before entering marriage, according to Akin, is, “Are you trustworthy for life?”³¹ A healthy relationship shows confidence and commitment. Each will know of the love and devotion of the other.³² When a couple approaches dating this way, they can be assured that significant questions will be answered about one another, and lines will be drawn. Dating according to biblical principles helps a couple prepare and lead toward marriage.

A Biblical Understanding of Divorce and Remarriage

A second cultural issue affecting the family is divorce and remarriage. Many people have been directly or indirectly touched by divorce. Some have experienced it as a

²⁷ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 37-39.

²⁸ Akin, *God on Sex*, 88.

²⁹ Akin, *God on Sex*, 88.

³⁰ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 37-39.

³¹ Akin, *God on Sex*, 91.

³² Akin, *God on Sex*, 91.

divorced person, and others have experienced it in their families. Living in a fallen world, fallen people have learned habits which are not only sinful but also damaging to relationships.³³ “Although divorce is always a consequence of sinful human attitudes and behavior and should not be encouraged or promoted by any Christian leader, Scripture recognizes that not all divorces are in and of themselves sinful.”³⁴

Divorce is an epidemic in the modern world. While the statistics vary from source to source, divorce is growing at a staggering rate. One can define divorce as the “legal or customary decree that marriage is dissolved.”³⁵ The term is derived from the Latin *divortium*, from *divertere, divortere*, “to separate.” Divorce is distinguished from annulment, in which it is declared by some authoritative body that the marriage attempt by a couple was invalid according to the rules of society, and that—as a consequence—a true marriage never existed.³⁶

Divorce is not the unpardonable sin. A divorced person is not a second-class citizen or a second-class Christian. Even though divorce is a sin and a failure, it is not the unforgivable sin, and it is not a fatal failure. The ultimate meaning of marriage is the representation of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and His church. According to John Piper, “To live this truth- and to show this truth- is what it means, most deeply, to be married.”³⁷

Occasions When Divorce is Permitted

God hates divorce, because it always involves unfaithfulness to the solemn

³³ Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, Australia: Mattias Media, 2002), 155.

³⁴ John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 110-11.

³⁵ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 100.

³⁶ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 100.

³⁷ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 159.

covenant of marriage into which two people have entered before Him and because it brings harmful consequences to those partners and their children (Mal 2:14-16). Divorce, in Scripture, is permitted only because of mankind's sin. Since divorce is a concession to man's sin and is not part of God's original plan for marriage, all believers should hate divorce as God does and pursue it only when there is no other recourse. With God's help, a marriage can survive the worst sins.³⁸

In Matthew 19:3-9, Christ taught clearly that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin that violates God's original purpose for the intimate unity of permanence of the marriage bond (Gen 2:24).³⁹ Trying to find loopholes to holding a marriage together, the Pharisees came to Jesus to find reasons why it would be permissible for a husband to divorce his wife. Matthew 19:3 says, "And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" Jesus responds by implying that they are asking the wrong question. Instead of asking how a marriage can be legally broken, they should be asking how a marriage can be permanently held together.

Marriage is always the work of God. God is the one who makes a marriage and only God can break a marriage. Divorce is always the work of man. Only God has the right to separate what He has joined together. Every time a divorce takes place, sin is lurking in the shadows. It may be the sin of the husband. It may be the sin of the wife, or the sin of both, but sin is lurking somewhere. The Pharisees stated that Moses commanded divorce. Moses never commanded divorce. In fact, Moses commanded that if the divorce were to take place, the man had to give the wife a certificate. Moses never commanded divorce because God never commands divorce.

When the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus with a question about divorce, Russell

³⁸ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 73.

³⁹ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 73.

Moore contends that Jesus knew the issue was really about Him. This was true in terms both of the immediate situation and also of the macroscopic view of the whole Bible and the whole universe. They wanted, as they often did, to put Jesus in a difficult situation with the crowds, in which He would seem to be “exposed as outside of God’s revelation to Moses.”⁴⁰ This was not a truthful question about views on marital permanence; it was a trap. Jesus responded that they missed the point of the Bible’s storyline: God’s purposes in creation. By pointing to the Mosaic era’s provisions for divorce, they were missing that such things were not so “from the beginning” (Matt 19:1-12).⁴¹ There are, arguably, some circumstances where divorce and remarriage are biblically permitted. “Most evangelical Christians acknowledge that sexual immorality can dissolve a marital union and that the innocent party is then free to remarry (Matt 5:32). The same is true, for most, for abandonment (1 Cor 7:11-15).”⁴²

Jesus points the Pharisees to Moses. In doing so, it reminded them that Moses didn’t just write Deuteronomy, which they are about to quote. Moses also wrote Genesis. In Mark 10:4, the Pharisees say, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” That is true. It is a reference to Deuteronomy 24:1. In Mark 10:5, Jesus says to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.” John Piper notes that this statement “implies that there are laws in the Old Testament that are not expressions of God’s will for all time, but expressions of how best to manage sin in a particular people at a particular time.”⁴³ Divorce is never commanded and never instituted in the Old Testament. But it was permitted and regulated—as polygamy was permitted and regulated, and as certain kinds of slavery were permitted and regulated.

⁴⁰ Moore, *Onward*, 165.

⁴¹ Moore, *Onward*, 165.

⁴² Moore, *Onward*, 177.

⁴³ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 160.

Jesus says here that this permission was not a reflection of God's ideal for His people; it was a reflection of the hardness of the human heart.⁴⁴

Then Jesus takes the Pharisees back to God's will in creation, quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, and shows the way it is supposed to be. Mark 10:6-8 says, "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."⁴⁵ Jesus says in Mark 10:8, "So they are no longer two but one flesh." In other words, since God said in Genesis 2:24, "They shall become one flesh," Jesus concludes for His day and ours: "So they are (now) no longer two but one flesh." Marriage is a very profound union, just as Christ and the church are one body (Rom 12:5). Then Jesus concludes that this union of one flesh is the work of God, not man. Jesus says in Mark 10:9, "Let not man separate." The word translated "man" is not the word for male versus female, but the word for human versus divine.⁴⁶ The clear point is that human beings have no right to separate what God has joined together. "Since God created this sacred union with this sacred purpose to display the unbreakable union of His covenant love for His people, it simply does not lie within man's rights to destroy what God created."⁴⁷

The New Testament grounds for divorce are sexual sin or desertion (abandonment) by an unbeliever.⁴⁸ Based on the biblical teaching of divorce and remarriage, one can logically conclude that if Christ ever abandons His church, then a man may divorce his wife. And if the blood-bought church, under the new covenant, ever ceases to be the bride of Christ, then a wife may legitimately divorce her husband. "But

⁴⁴ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 160.

⁴⁵ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 161.

⁴⁶ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 161-62.

⁴⁷ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 161-62.

⁴⁸ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 74.

as long as Christ keeps His covenant with the church, and as long as the church, by the omnipotent grace of God, remains the chosen people of Christ, then the very meaning of marriage will include: what God has joined, only God can separate.”⁴⁹

Sexual sin as grounds for divorce. Sexual sin as grounds for divorce is found in Jesus’ use of the Greek word *porneia* (Matt 5:32; 19:9). *Porneia* is a general term that encompasses sexual sin, such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest. In the Old Testament, God Himself divorced the northern kingdom of Israel because of her idolatry, which He likened to sexual sin (Jer 3:6-9).⁵⁰ With this being a general term and in view of its New Testament usage, it seems best to take the term in a broader sense of an absence of chastity that includes “every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.” As stated above, *porneia* can include adultery but is not limited to it. Paul uses *porneia* in reference to incest (1 Cor 5:1) and intercourse with prostitutes (1 Cor 6:13). Unlawful sexual intercourse would also include premarital unchastity (Matt 1:18-19), homosexual practices (Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-28; 1 Cor 6:9), and bestiality (Lev 18:23). Such acts of sexual immorality violate the “one flesh” principle, which is fundamental to the unity and exclusivity of marriage as divinely ordained.⁵¹

Desertion by an unbelieving spouse as grounds for divorce. The second reason for permitting divorce is in cases in which an unbelieving spouse does not desire to live with his or her believing partner (1 Cor 7:12-15). Because “God has called us to peace” (1 Cor 7:15), divorce is allowed in such situations.⁵² In the case of desertion by an unbelieving spouse, the Christian may divorce and subsequently remarry. An important

⁴⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 159.

⁵⁰ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 74.

⁵¹ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 106.

⁵² MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 74.

question of interpretation and pastoral application become apparent at this point: What circumstances constitute desertion? Is the term to be narrowly or broadly defined? Physical abandonment of the spouse and long-term absence from the household would certainly qualify as desertion, but could the term also be extended to cases of persistent physical abuse, drunkenness, lack of financial support, or denial of conjugal rights?⁵³ It might be argued that there is a basis in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 for the broader interpretation of desertion. Even in such difficult cases, however, the church should not encourage divorce. If all attempts at reconciliation fail, legal separation is available as a means to protect the abused spouse.⁵⁴ Biblically understanding divorce and remarriage drives a couple to remain faithful in their marriage.

Occasions When Remarriage is Permitted

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner only when a divorce is based on biblical grounds (Rom 7:1-3; 1 Cor 7:39).⁵⁵ With respect to remarriage, it is commonly held in evangelical circles that in cases of divorce occasioned by sexual infidelity or desertion by an unbelieving spouse, the offended party has the right to remarry. The bonds of the marriage have been broken by the act of unfaithfulness or desertion, and remarriage is then possible subsequent to divorce. What can be said about the status of the guilty party in such a divorce? May such a person legitimately remarry? According to John Jefferson Davis, “the answer would be in the affirmative if the guilty party has truly repented and attempted to make restitution for personal and financial obligations that may have been forsaken during the dissolution of the marriage.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 109.

⁵⁴ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 110.

⁵⁵ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 75.

⁵⁶ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 111.

The Bible is clear that those who divorce for any reason, except sexual immorality or desertion, have sinned against God and their spouses, and for them to marry another is an act of “adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). This is why Paul says a believing woman who sinfully divorces should “remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (1 Cor 7:10-11). If she repents from her sins of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would include seeking reconciliation with her former spouse (Matt 5:23-24). The same is true for a believing man who divorces unbiblically but later repents (1 Cor 7:11). Such a person could marry someone else only if the former spouse remarried or died, in which case reconciliation would be impossible.⁵⁷

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds, and there is still a responsibility to reconcile, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12).⁵⁸ In cases where the divorce took place on unbiblical grounds and the guilty partner later repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. A sign of true repentance will be a desire to implement I Corinthians 7:10-11, which would involve an eagerness to pursue reconciliation with his or her former spouse if that is possible.⁵⁹ In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on unbiblical grounds and remarried, he or she is guilty of the sin of adultery until that sin is confessed (Mark 10:11-12). “God does forgive that sin immediately when repentance takes place, and there is nothing in Scripture to indicate anything other than the fact that from that point on, the believer should continue in his or her current marriage.”⁶⁰

When a person takes such a stand on the inviolability and sacredness of

⁵⁷ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 75.

⁵⁸ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 75.

⁵⁹ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 77.

⁶⁰ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, 77-78.

marriage and the illegitimacy of divorce and remarriage while the spouses are alive, there are many questions, both biblical and practical, that have to be answered.⁶¹ Does death end a marriage in such a way that it is legitimate for a spouse to remarry? The answer is yes, and no one has seriously questioned this. Paul says in Romans 7:1-3 that to divorce and remarry while your spouse is living is adulterous, but to remarry after the death of a spouse is not.⁶²

If a divorced person has already married again, should he or she leave the current marriage? Remarriage, while a divorced spouse is still living, is an act of unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant. In that sense, to remarry is adultery. But a person who remarries against God's will and thus commits adultery should not later break the second marriage. According to John Piper, several factors lead to this conclusion. First, in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, where the permission for divorce was given in the law of Moses, it speaks of the divorced woman being "defiled" in the second marriage so that it would be an abomination for her to return to her first husband, even if her second husband died. This language of defilement is similar to Jesus' language of adultery. Yet the second marriage stood. It was defiling in some sense, yet it was valid.

According to Piper, the second reason remarried couples should stay together is that when Jesus met the woman of Samaria, He said to her, "For you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband" (John 4:18). When Jesus says, "The one you now have is not your husband," He seems to imply that the other five were. Not that it is right to divorce and remarry five times, but the way Jesus speaks of it sounds as though He saw them as real marriages. The third reason remarried couples should stay together, according to Piper, is that even vows that should not be made, once

⁶¹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 169.

⁶² Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 169.

they are made, should generally be kept. There are passages in the Bible that speak of vows being made that should not have been made, but they were right to keep (such as Joshua's vow to the Gibeonites in Josh 9). God puts a very high value on keeping one's word, even when it gets him/her in trouble. There are marriages in many churches that are second marriages for one or both partners, which should not have happened, but today they are godly and holy marriages. As forgiven, cleansed, Spirit-led followers of Jesus Christ, they are not committing adultery in their marriages. These marriages should not have occurred; however, they have become holy.⁶³

A Biblical Understanding of Homosexuality

For millennia, civilizations have defined marriage as an exclusive, permanent union of a man and a woman. David Platt points out that two decades ago, politicians in the United States voted across party lines to defend this definition of marriage in what was called the Defense of Marriage Act. Yet in June 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States struck down key provisions of that act, clearing the way for the complete redefinition of marriage across our culture. Platt argues that “in the days that followed, states began officially defining marriage according to different terms, now notably allowing same-sex relationships to be classified as so-called marriages.”⁶⁴ So-called “same-sex marriage” is now recognized as a legitimate entity in the eyes of our government. Such a designation by a government, however, does not change the definition God has ordained. “The only true marriage in God's eyes remains the exclusive, permanent union of a man and a woman, even as the Supreme Court and state legislatures deliberately defy this reality.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 170-71.

⁶⁴ David Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 132.

⁶⁵ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 152.

The word “homosexuality” can be used in several ways. The term can be used to refer to an act (or class of actions), or to a disposition to act in a certain way. J.C. Dwyer’s definition is helpful at this point, for it covers both character and action. He defines homosexuality as a “preference, on the part of adults, for sexual behavior with members of their own sex.”⁶⁶ In this section, homosexuality is understood as one who, in adult life is motivated by “a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually (but not necessarily) engages in overt sexual relations with them.”⁶⁷

The Bible and Homosexuality

Christians need not worry about whether marriage is going to endure the test of time. Ultimately, human beings do not look to any court or government to define marriage. “God has already done that, and His definition cannot be eradicated by a vote of legislators or the opinions of Supreme Court justices.”⁶⁸ It is a surprise to many people to discover that there are only a few passages in the Bible that directly mention homosexuality. When it does, however, the Bible has significant and pointed things to say about homosexuality.⁶⁹ Several biblical passages clearly teach that homosexual practice, according to God’s wisdom, love, compassion, and divine law, is completely prohibited.⁷⁰

God, in His love, gives His people boundaries for their bodies; He loves them and knows what is best for them. He desires to protect His children from harm and

⁶⁶ J. C. Dwyer, *Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 64.

⁶⁷ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 114.

⁶⁸ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 153.

⁶⁹ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 25.

⁷⁰ Chip Ingram, *Culture Shock: A Biblical Response to Today’s Most Divisive Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 111.

provide for them something greater than they can see.⁷¹ Men and women have distinct bodies that have been made in God's image. The Bible emphasizes the importance of our bodies, saying that the body is meant "for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor 6:13). Our bodies have been created not only by God but also for God.⁷² This is precisely why God prohibits sexual prostitution (Lev 19:29; Deut 23:18; Prov 6:25-26) and sexual violence (Deut 22:25-27). He commands us not to have sex with animals (Lev 18:23; 20:15-16) or relatives (Lev 18; 6; 1 Cor 5:1-2). These are boundaries on which most people agree in our culture, but they are not the only boundaries the Bible includes. With the same force of command, God also prohibits sex between a man and a woman who are not married to each other. The Bible calls this adultery, and it is forbidden in the Ten Commandments.⁷³

The New Testament describes "dishonorable passions" (Rom 1:26) with the example of women who "exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature" and men who "likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another,...committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Rom 1:26-27). God is clear in His Word that homosexual activity is prohibited. "According to God, sex with anyone who is not your husband or your wife is sin, whether that happens before marriage, during marriage, or after marriage."⁷⁴

One of the most significant passages in the New Testament on sexual immorality is found in Romans 1:21, 24, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and

⁷¹ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 160.

⁷² Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 159.

⁷³ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 162-63.

⁷⁴ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 162.

their foolish hearts were darkened Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.” These potent verses diagnose dark hearts as the root of sinful desires. In the heart, all have a sinful tendency to turn aside from God’s way to our wants. This tendency has a clear effect on our sexuality.⁷⁵ A person’s disposition toward a behavior does not mean justification for that behavior. “That’s the way he is” does not mean “that’s how he should act.”⁷⁶

Proponents of gay liberation have developed a number of strategies in dealing with the biblical material against homosexuality. Michael Hill mentions two of these strategies and believes they are fundamental to the defense of the gay lifestyle. The first, according to Hill, is in relation to particular passages that appear to condemn homosexual acts. Proponents argue that the context of these passages, when examined in detail, reveals that the Scripture is not addressing the lifestyle and practices of people with a fixed homosexual disposition. Rather it is argued that the texts are addressing the occasional homosexual practices of heterosexuals. These practices include homosexual rape and homosexual intercourse where there is no mutual consent. The claim is that the biblical writers were unfamiliar with the condition of true homosexual orientation and did not confront it as a moral issue. The second strategy, according to Hill, appeals to broad biblical themes such as love and highlights the implications of these themes in relation to the moral evaluation of homosexuals and homosexual activity.⁷⁷

Some have claimed that homosexual activity here is only condemned because of its association with idolatry in that day. But homosexual activity is addressed alongside adultery, incest, bestiality, and child sacrifice in biblical passages. Surely these

⁷⁵ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 166.

⁷⁶ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 168.

⁷⁷ Hill, *The How and Why of Love*, 181-82.

things are not permissible as long as they are avoided in the context of idolatry.⁷⁸ Moreover, Paul takes the same term that is used for “homosexual activity” in Leviticus 18 to refer to homosexual activity as dishonoring to God in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1. He writes, “Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10). Similarly, he includes “the sexually immoral” and “men who practice homosexuality” in a list of the “disobedient” that also includes “murderers, . . . enslavers (and) liars” (1 Tim 1:8-11).⁷⁹

Foundational for any Christian understanding of human sexuality is the creation account in Genesis 1-2. God’s original creative design is manifested in the creation of male and female in His own image (Gen 1:27).⁸⁰ The first reference to homosexuality in the Bible is found in Genesis 19:1-11, where Lot entertained the two angels sent to Sodom to investigate the outcry against the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20-22). Lot received the angels into his house, and, at evening, the men of the city surrounded the house and demanded to see his visitors and to “know” them. D. S. Bailey argues that the demand to “know” the strangers was nothing more than a desire to get better acquainted; it was not more than a matter of a breach of hospitality. “The word *yada* appears some 943 times in the Old Testament,” notes Bailey, “and only on 12 occasions does it clearly mean ‘to have intercourse with’; elsewhere it means ‘to get acquainted with’ or ‘to have knowledge of.’”⁸¹ The problem with Bailey’s argument is that mere word counting is no proof of meaning; the use of a word in its specific context

⁷⁸ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 169.

⁷⁹ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 169.

⁸⁰ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 121.

⁸¹ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 122.

is the decisive consideration. In the book of Genesis, the word *yada* is used 12 times, and in 10 of those instances it denotes sexual intercourse. Even more to the point, “in the immediate context in Genesis 19:8, *yada* is used in a way that unmistakably refers to sexual intercourse.”⁸²

Homosexual practices are strongly condemned in the Mosaic Law. Leviticus 18:22 says, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” Such offenses carried the capital penalty: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them” (Lev 20:13).⁸³ The New Testament also contains prohibitions against homosexuality in three places: Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10. Of these three references, the one in Romans is theologically the most significant, since it discusses homosexuality in the larger context of man’s relation to God and God’s general revelation in nature.⁸⁴ In Romans 1:18-32, the apostle Paul was concerned to establish the Gentile world’s guilt before God and their need for the gospel. The Gentile world’s alienation from God is evidenced in the sphere of human sexuality because they turned away from the true worship of God.⁸⁵

It is also significant that in the Pauline analysis, homosexual practices commence not from the social environment but from the human heart or inner disposition, which has turned away from God, its ultimate good, and turned toward the mutable goods of creation, including the self.⁸⁶ In 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul used two terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, generally considered to refer to homosexual practices. 1

⁸² Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 122.

⁸³ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 124.

⁸⁴ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 126.

⁸⁵ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 126.

⁸⁶ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 127.

Corinthians 6:9-10, “Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality (*arsenokoitai*) . . . will inherit the kingdom of God.” Both C.K. Barrett and Hans Conzelmann, in their commentaries on 1 Corinthians, “take *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* to refer respectively to the passive and active partners in male homosexual relations.”⁸⁷ The term *arsenokoitai* is used in 1 Timothy 1:10, “The law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for. . . immoral men and homosexuals.”⁸⁸

With respect to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10, Michael Ukleja writes, “Only wild speculation can avoid the conclusion that Paul knew exactly what he means and how he should be understood when he used these terms.”⁸⁹ Both the Old and New Testaments are unequivocal in their teaching that homosexuality is contrary to the moral law of God, and only the most forced and arbitrary modes of biblical interpretation can conclude otherwise. A man’s disposition (“heart”) is the ultimate driving force behind outward actions. As Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”⁹⁰

Homosexual sin is serious. Paul says that the active and unrepentant homosexual (as with all the unrighteous) will not enter God’s kingdom.⁹¹ Again, Michael Ukleja says, “Only towering cynicism can pretend that there is any doubt about what the Scriptures say about homosexuality.”⁹² There can be no doubt, given the biblical evidence, that a Christian who desires to serve the Lord and do the will of his or her

⁸⁷ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 127.

⁸⁸ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 128-29.

⁸⁹ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 129.

⁹⁰ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 129-30.

⁹¹ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 35.

⁹² Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 121.

heavenly Father cannot justifiably participate in homosexual activities or pursue a gay lifestyle.”⁹³

The Body and Homosexuality

In His love for us, God has told us the best use of our bodies, and He has been specific when it comes to our sexuality. Seen from the very beginning of the Bible, God designed a man’s and a woman’s body to join together as “one flesh” in marriage (Gen 2:24). The language of “one flesh” points to the personal nature of this union. Sex is not a mechanical act between two objects, it is a relational bond between two people. This physical union is designed by God for a man and a woman who have committed their lives in a covenant relationship with each other.⁹⁴

According to Chip Ingram, there are several significant factors that influence a person who struggles with same-sex attraction. First, the father’s role has an impact in the home. The relationship between sexual identity and the father’s role is a huge factor in a child’s life. Exploring the background of active homosexuals, one will often discover a family background that involves an absent father, abusive father, disengaged father, or smothering mother. Second, according to Ingram, one will find there are multiple development factors that can impact later behavior. A third influence, according to Ingram, on people’s understanding of sexuality apart from genetics, can be called environmental factors. The media has gone to great lengths to normalize immoral behavior.⁹⁵

Promoting the homosexual lifestyle as normal and healthy simply flies in the face of the medical and empirical evidence. Seventy-eight percent of male homosexuals

⁹³ Hill, *The How and Why of Love*, 195.

⁹⁴ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 161.

⁹⁵ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 100-02.

have or have had a sexually transmitted disease. A survey of more than 2,300 homosexuals in New York and three other cities found thirty-seven percent of men and fourteen percent of the women reported having a non-HIV sexually transmitted disease. More than fifty percent of all homosexual men are carriers of the human papillomavirus (HPV). Male homosexuals are about 1,000 times more likely to acquire HIV/AIDS than the general population. How does a person say to someone that he/she really cares about, “Whatever you want to do is okay; it is fine that you may only live half as long as expected life spans?”⁹⁶

Logically, homosexuality is a lifestyle without the ability to reproduce. Sexual differentiation is the basis of human marriage, procreation, and family life, which is the primal form of the human community.⁹⁷ “Homosexual relationships cannot fulfill the procreative dimensions of human sexuality and marriage, which are part of the divine intention for mankind.”⁹⁸ Genesis 1:28 says, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”

Historically, there has never been a culture that has survived, a society that has thrived when homosexuality became mainstream and culturally accepted. “The anatomy of the human body, its design and reproductive purpose, lead us to understand that on intellectual, medical, and biological grounds, the homosexual lifestyle is neither normal nor healthy.”⁹⁹ Again, the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 reveal the intent of God in that not only does He say, “Let us make mankind in our image” (Gen 1:26), but also specifying, “male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). The implied, clear design is

⁹⁶ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 106-7.

⁹⁷ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 121.

⁹⁸ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 121.

⁹⁹ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 109.

heterosexual.¹⁰⁰

It has been suggested that some persons are predisposed toward homosexuality by genetic and chromosomal factors for which they can be assigned no personal responsibility. John Money, a researcher at the Johns Hopkins University and leading authority on the physiological aspects of human sexuality, concluded that “there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that homosexuals or bisexuals of any degree or type are chromosomally discrepant from heterosexuals.”¹⁰¹ Imbalances in the sex hormones have also been suggested as a possible cause for or contributing factor to homosexual behavior. It has been pointed out, however, that while the sex hormones are crucial for the physiological development of the organs needed for the sexual act and for increasing their sensitivity to stimulation, the psychological factors are the crucial elements that influence the choice of the sexual partner and the intensity of sexual emotions. There is no evidence that treating male homosexuals with male hormones significantly changes the sexual preference. “The clear implication of these results is that sexual preference is predominately a socially learned response, not an orientation fixed from the outset by genetic or hormonal factors.”¹⁰²

Family psychopathology has often been suggested as a possible cause of homosexuality. There is some evidence to suggest that the combination of a domineering mother and a father who is detached or hostile can contribute to this condition. It should be noted, however, that evidence does not appear to indicate that such factors are either necessary or a sufficient condition for the cause of homosexual behavior.¹⁰³ It is also important to note that if a young person has a loving feeling toward someone of the same

¹⁰⁰ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 110-11.

¹⁰¹ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 117.

¹⁰² Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 117.

¹⁰³ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 118.

sex, it does not mean that he or she is gay. “Feelings of friendship or closeness can be powerful and should not be equated with sexual attraction.”¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

In contrast to the position of the homosexual community, the historic biblical position is that homosexuality is immoral, among the prohibited lifestyles. Chip Ingram lists 8 biblical principles on homosexuality. First, sex is a sacred expression within the confines of marriage between a man and a woman. Second, all sexual expression outside these bounds is immoral and prohibited (these include fornication, homosexuality, adultery, and bestiality). Third, by logical implication, then, a gay person is not born that way, and the thinking and behavior are learned, developed, or chosen. Fourth, the Bible does not teach that people are guilty of having been tempted with same-sex attraction any more or less than those tempted by heterosexual attraction. But the Bible does prohibit same-sex behavior. Fifth, biblically speaking, homosexuality is not something that one is (identity); homosexuality is something that one does. What the Bible prohibits is homosexual or same-sex behavior. Sixth, if homosexual behaviors are something a person does as a learned or chosen behavior that is prohibited by God for a person’s protection and for their good, then it is abnormal and unnatural. Seventh, far from being simply an acceptable “alternative” way of living, it is actually a destructive lifestyle. Eighth, homosexual behavior is a moral issue in which something “wrong” (like stealing or lying) is being promoted as something right.¹⁰⁵

One of the most difficult steps for those in the gay lifestyle is to recognize that homosexuality is a behavior, not an identity.¹⁰⁶ Once a homosexual, always a

¹⁰⁴ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 119.

¹⁰⁵ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 94-95.

¹⁰⁶ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 120.

homosexual, simply is not true any more than once a sex addict or once an alcoholic or once a workaholic means that one always has to stay in that lifestyle.¹⁰⁷ If a person is genuinely born again, though they may still feel same sex attractions at times, they must guard against the flesh and refuse to give in to those temptations.

After one hears the Bible's exhortation to "flee from sexual immorality," God says to us, "For you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:18, 20). The good news of the Gospel is that God so loves sinners that He sent His Son to pay the price for all sin. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." As Jesus hung on the cross, He took all of our sins upon Himself.¹⁰⁸ However, "repentance does not mean total perfection, but it does mean a new direction."¹⁰⁹

The church cannot compromise the fundamental biblical teaching: homosexuality is contrary to the divine will for human sexuality. "To compromise at this point abdicates the fundamental responsibility of the church, namely, to sound forth to the society a clear word from God, which transcends the shifting currents of human opinion and fashion."¹¹⁰ At the same time, Christian congregations must honestly examine themselves in terms of their own attitudes toward the struggling homosexual. The Bible nowhere teaches that homosexuality is the unforgivable sin; churches must reject the sin but be willing and ready to be used of God in the reclamation of the sinner.¹¹¹ The Christian church also needs to sound forth a clear message of the power of

¹⁰⁷ Ingram, *Culture Shock*, 122.

¹⁰⁸ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 174.

¹⁰⁹ Platt, *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*, 177.

¹¹⁰ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 131.

¹¹¹ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 132.

divine grace to transform sinful attitudes.¹¹² After cataloging a variety of sexual sins of which the Corinthians had been guilty prior to their conversions (1 Cor 6:9-10), Paul went on to write, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Some who were previously involved in homosexual practices were given a brand new start in the eyes of God, and the old nature was being transformed through faith in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹³

¹¹² Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 132.

¹¹³ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 132.

CHAPTER 4

THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAMILY ROLES MINISTRY PROJECT

My view of preaching flows out of my view of the Bible. To understand properly the importance of preaching and how it impacts the life of a church, a preacher must be convinced and convicted that there is something meaningful about the text. He must believe the Bible is the very Word of God. As a matter of fact, God's favorite expression for the Bible is "The Word of God." For example, Acts 4:31 says, "They spoke the Word of God with boldness." The Bible also says in Hebrews 4:12, "And the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword." The apostle Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."

This is the foundation on which I formulate my view and theology of preaching and why this four-week series on the family from the book of Colossians had a deep and lasting impact on the families at WSBC. 1 Peter 1:25 says, "But the Word of the Lord remains forever. And this Word is the good news that was preached to you." The Bible provides the message of the church which is the Gospel. Everything preached springs from, and relates to, the Gospel. This is the message of the church. God's method of getting His glorious message to the hearts of people is through the preaching of that Word.

Preaching is essential to this ministry project because of the way preaching works in the human heart. The exact nature of expository preaching can be difficult to define and is defined differently by pastors and scholars alike. Bryan Chappell defines an

expository message as “a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of a text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principle for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.”¹ Haddon Robinson defines it as “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”² Those concepts are crucial to this project and to expository preaching because authority resides in the biblical author’s specific intent in writing a biblical text. The text of a sermon dictates and determines the shape, form, and content of the message.

With this foundation of expository preaching and the need to equip families at WSBC, this ministry project was prepared and implemented with these convictions in mind. The prayerful planning and strategic development of the four-week sermon series in Colossians 3:18-21 was both educational and enjoyable. The entire project deepened my understanding of the family and was a joy to share with the people of Walnut Street Baptist Church. The preparation for the sermon series took approximately five weeks. The first week was dedicated to developing exegetical outlines for the respective messages. The following four weeks focused on sermon preparation for each individual family member.

Time was given to the process of identifying and selecting church members for the pre and post survey. With the assistance of the WSBC staff, I was able to select a list of individuals who agreed to participate in completing the survey, listening attentively to

¹ Bryan Chappell. *Christ-Centered Preaching; Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 30-31.

² Haddon Robinson. *Biblical Preaching; The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21.

the messages, and completing a post-sermon series survey. The analysis of the surveys was insightful to determine if the sermon series increased Bible knowledge in the life of each individual.

The final element of the project was the invitation to five individuals to assist in the evaluation of the sermon series. The analysis of the five individuals' evaluation forms also assisted me in a deeper understanding of the sermon content and delivery.

Preparation of the Sermon Series

Each sermon in the series was developed and written with three essential components in mind: preach the text with authority, explain the text with accuracy, and apply the text with authenticity. As I prepared these four messages, I understood that the messages brought to the listeners must be presented with authority. Biblical writers wrote God's words with a specific intention. The meaning of a text is defined by what the author willed to communicate. Every passage in the Bible had an intended meaning when the author wrote it, and that meaning has not changed. "Words have an agreed-on meaning, and that meaning is revealed by its context."³ The author's intention is the meaning of a text. The biblical writers penned God's words with a specific intention as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The preachers' task, first of all, is to present the text with authority.

As I prepared the series, I also understood that I must explain the text with accuracy. The expositor must communicate the author's specific intention to his hearers. If the biblical author had a specific intention in writing, the preacher must faithfully communicate and explain that intention to his hearers. An author writes because he/she has something to convey to his/her readers. If that is the author's motive in writing, then

³ Hershael W. York, *Preaching with Bold Assurance; A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 30.

the motive in reading should be to discover what the author wants to convey. I know I have to be willing to do the hard work of exegesis if the structure and content of the sermon is to be conveyed with authority and accuracy.

Understanding this crucial element is paramount in shaping the structure of a text. The ultimate authority behind expository preaching lies not in the preacher but in the biblical text.⁴ We must always consider the context as a part of any text. We cannot maintain the integrity of any biblical statement without considering its surroundings. Our task as preachers is to discern what the original writers meant by analyzing the background and grammatical features of what they said.⁵ The biblical author's intention and the context of the passage dictate the structure of the sermon. If a passage is taken out of context, a preacher risks his opinions becoming as authoritative as the statements of God. Without a commitment to explaining the text with accuracy we can make the bible say anything we want.

Authorial intent is also important in constructing the content of the sermon. There is great danger in interpreting a passage or communicating a message that is driven by our own ideas of the text rather than the text itself. Our goal is to bend our thoughts to the Scriptures rather than using the Scriptures to support our thoughts.⁶ The content of a sermon is dictated by the biblical author's intention in the text, not on the preacher's presuppositions.

An expository preacher must present the text with authority, explain the text with accuracy, and, finally, apply the text with authenticity. It is the Holy Spirit that applies the author's specific intention to the lives of the people. The result of faithful expository preaching brings the author's intent into the lives of the people. The preacher

⁴ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24.

⁵ Chappell, *Christ Centered Preaching*, 76-77.

⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 22.

must always wrestle with how the content of a passage might change his people and how it directly relates to the congregation. As preachers, we must know our people authentically as well as the message of the text. To acquire that knowledge, we must exegete both the Scriptures and the congregation.⁷

Essential components of an expository message present the text with authority, explain the text with accuracy, and apply the text with authenticity. We must always remember that authority resides in the author's specific intention of a biblical text. The biblical authors wrote God's words with a specific intention. The preacher communicates the biblical author's specific intention to his hearers. The Holy Spirit then applies that specific intention to the congregation. When we have a commitment to understanding the author's intent in every passage of Scripture, and that intention is conveyed to the congregation, the Holy Spirit will apply those truths to their lives for His glory.

It was with the above approach that this sermon series was developed. This process was followed as I prepared an exegetical sermon series from Colossians 3:18-21. The purpose of this sermon series was to preach concerning each individual family member in order to equip WSBC families to fulfill their God-given roles and responsibilities.

As the first week of sermon preparation began, I spent much time in prayer and brainstorming. My prayer time consisted of confession and searching of my heart so that I could hear God clearly. I wanted to be able to hear God and articulate His words to His people. I divided the passage into four sections, each section dealing with the respective family member: wife, husband, children, and parents.

The first step in my process of sermon preparation was to read the text in its context ten to fifteen times. After I had a good understanding of the text itself, I began to

⁷ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 28.

select the natural divisions of the text. Once I finished selecting the natural divisions, I began to carefully walk through the text. I highlighted any verbs or recurring words that implied action on the part of each family member.

At this point I made sure I understood the context in which my passage resided in the book of Colossians. From there I was able to develop my main point or central aim for each particular message. Once completed, I was prepared to develop the structure of each sermon which consisted of the main points, explanation of the points, illustrations, and applications.⁸

As the dates approached for the sermon series to be delivered, I continued praying over the text and prepared message. My prayer was that the Holy Spirit would anoint me to preach with power. This is a significant part in preaching ministry because the role of the Holy Spirit is crucial in effective sermon preparation and delivery. A preacher may be a gifted intellectual and a powerful orator, but apart from the Holy Spirit he will have no power. It is incumbent upon the gospel preacher to recognize the overpowering nature of his inabilities and rely totally on the Holy Spirit of God.⁹

The role of the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation and delivery begins in the life of the preacher. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own.” Every preacher wants the Holy Spirit’s power. But before he can have the power of the Spirit he has to have the presence of the Spirit. Jesus said in John 14:16, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” Character and spiritual maturity are essential for the preacher of the Gospel. Deep godly character, or spiritual maturity, combines qualities that cannot be united in the natural man apart from

⁸ See appendix 3.

⁹ Art Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2015), 143.

the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ The preacher must have a walk with God and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in order to effectively communicate the Gospel with power. A preacher of the gospel must prepare himself more than he prepares his sermon.¹¹ One of the primary activities of the Holy Spirit is to cleanse the believer from sin and to sanctify them. Sanctification comes by the power of the Holy Spirit.

One can see this ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament where the Spirit empowered people for special service. He empowered Joshua with leadership skills and wisdom (Num 27:18; Deut 34:9). He empowered the judges to deliver Israel from their oppressors. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, Jephthah and Samson (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25). The Holy Spirit came mightily upon Saul to arouse him to battle against the enemies of Israel (1 Sam 11:6). In the New Testament there are many activities that are said to be done in the Holy Spirit: rejoice in the Spirit, make decisions in the Holy Spirit, have ones conscience bear witness in the Holy Spirit, have access to God in the Holy Spirit, pray in the Holy Spirit, love in the Holy Spirit and be filled with the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with the immediate presence of God himself. Therefore, it will result in feeling what God feels, desiring what God desires, doing what God wants, speaking by God's power, praying and ministering in God's strength, and knowing with the knowledge which God Himself gives.¹²

The Holy Spirit not only illumines the preacher, but it is the Spirit that has gifted the preacher. It is the Spirit that inspires unction in the preacher. When this happens, power is conveyed through the preached word.¹³ The apostle Paul said in 1

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 197.

¹¹ Keller, *Preaching*, 205.

¹² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 637.

¹³ Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 122.

Corinthians 2:4-5, “And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” Martyn Lloyd Jones said, “Preaching is theology through a man who is on fire.”¹⁴ Unction is God setting the preacher on fire through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit’s role is significant not only in the life of the preacher but also in the preparation of the preacher. Since the Spirit of God is the Helper, He will guide us to truth. A preacher must trust His leading and direction in his life. This includes sermon construction and delivery. One of the ways the Spirit of God helps us is in understanding the Word of God. Jesus said about the Holy in John 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

Christians cannot understand the Bible apart from the Holy Spirit of God. Any individual can pick up history, psychology, philosophy, science, math books and generally understand the concepts. Even with Scripture, on a purely intellectual level, a person may possess the mental faculties necessary to assimilate some of the concepts being communicated. He may even possess the skill to respond in a certain way. But to acknowledge the truth in his heart and conform it to his will is beyond his fallen capacities.¹⁵ Apart from the Holy Spirit of God to guide the preacher, he cannot understand the Word of God. The Holy Spirit of God on the inside of the preacher gives him the understanding of what is on the outside of him.¹⁶ Scripture gives many examples of direct guidance from the Holy Spirit to various people. The Bible speaks about the day-to-day guidance of the Holy Spirit that is essential in the life of the preacher.

¹⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 78.

¹⁵ Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, 41.

¹⁶ Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 46.

In sermon preparation and delivery, the Holy Spirit must enlighten the preacher. A minister will not know where to go or what to do apart from the Spirit of God and the Word of God. The preacher cannot do anything on his own and must rely on the Spirit of God to enable and illumine him to understand the truth of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps the preacher interpret the Word. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 that He is “interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him.” The work of the Holy Spirit in interpretation is not to add information, but to give the preacher the discipline to study well, and the humility to accept the truth he finds without distorting it, and often a much needed discovery or insight into the Spirit’s guidance of the preacher’s work.¹⁷ The Spirit’s role in sermon preparation and delivery is critical in the life of the preacher if he is going to preach with authority and power.

Finally, the Holy Spirit’s role is significant in the preacher’s proclamation of the Word of God. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones believed that the preacher must make room for freedom in the pulpit.¹⁸ The Holy Spirit prompts and leads the preacher during the sermon itself. Lloyd-Jones believed that freedom in the pulpit means that the Spirit will not be restricted. During the act of preaching, the Spirit can inform the mind, quicken the reason and reveal aspects of application of which the preacher was totally unaware in his preparation.¹⁹ The role of the Holy Spirit is vital in effective and powerful proclamation of the Word of God. The preacher can never convict sinners. Rather, the Holy Spirit of God uses the folly of preaching to convict sinners. He uses the Word of God flowing from a man’s mouth as the instrument. In all matters including prayer, study, preparation,

¹⁷ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 45-46.

¹⁸ Sargent, *Sacred Anointing*, 97.

¹⁹ Sargent, *Sacred Anointing*, 97.

and delivery, I desired to be true to the Word of God, sensitive to the Holy Spirit's working, and challenging to the people at WSBC.

Selection of Evaluators and Individuals for Surveys

In order to achieve the goals set for this ministry project, I invited four individuals, two WSBC staff members and two lay-leaders to participate in the evaluation process of the sermon series. Jason Cough, Matt Pinkston, Jeff Ross, and Bud Fekete willingly agreed to participate. Prior to the sermon series, each evaluator was given a Sermon Rubric Evaluation Form.²⁰ They were instructed on how to complete this form at the conclusion of each sermon in the series.

The selection of individual church members was a simple process. Twenty-two individuals were selected to participate in the family survey. In order to get a wide range of participants, I selected individuals who would agree to participate and be present during each of the four messages in the sermon series. Two weeks prior to the first message, the survey was given in the WSBC Fellowship Hall. Each respondent was given an identification number that was placed at the end of the survey. Upon the completion of the sermon series, the same group of individuals completed the same survey, placing their personal identification number at the end of the survey.

Implementation of Sermon Series

The pulpit is the most significant role in the life of any New Testament Church. It is behind that sacred desk, as the preacher of the Gospel expounds the Word of God, that direction and guidance are given. This was significant in this ministry project as the Word of God began to mold families for God's glory.

²⁰ See appendix 2.

The primary way a pastor leads is through the pulpit. It is in the pulpit that a pastor casts vision for the congregation. He defines and puts before his people clear mission and purpose. Ways to make ministry a reality in the life of the church spring forth from the pulpit. But most important of all, the Word of God is proclaimed through the pulpit. The people hear the voice of God as they sit under the proclaimed Word. This has significant implications for this ministry project. As the Word of God was expounded during the four-week sermon series, WSBC grasped not my creative ideas about the family, but the mission of God for every family. God moves through His proclaimed Word.²¹ 1 Corinthians 10:11 says, “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” If God moves through His proclaimed Word and God’s mission to bring people to Himself and display His glory, this makes the pulpit the most vital part of the local church, especially when it comes to fulfilling this ministry project.

In the pulpit, mission and purpose are declared. Good preaching allows the people of God to unite on a clear mission. When the gathered assembly comes to corporate worship, it allows all ears to be focused in a singular direction for the glory of God. It is the one time throughout the week that all eyes and ears are focused on the same thing. It is important when leading any organization that a leader has the attention of those he or she is leading. The pulpit and what flows from it are the centerpiece of the local church.

Both the preacher and the Holy Spirit play a huge part in missions’ mobilization from the pulpit. Man’s responsibility is to present the text with authority, explain the text with accuracy, and apply the text with authenticity. The Holy Spirit’s role involves shaping the preacher, illumining his heart and mind in preparation, and giving power to his proclamation. Understanding both the responsibility and role of the preacher

²¹ David E. Prince, “Expository Preaching and the Local Church” (lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, January 18, 2019).

and the Spirit in preaching during this series, several key ministry principles can be considered.

First, I had to prepare my heart on a moment-by-moment basis. I did this by being in constant communion with the Lord. Personal study and prayer are essential in keeping a pure heart. I enjoin the Holy Spirit to enliven my own spirit and mind in my study. The Spirit informed my mind as I studied the Bible. As I studied and prayed it was incumbent that my lifestyle in my own home match the word that I preach. Tim Keller writes, “Your listeners will be convinced by your message only if they are convinced by you as a person. People do not simply experience your words, arguments, and appeals as disembodied messages; they are always sensing and evaluating the source.”²²

A second ministry principle I considered as this ministry project was implemented is that I relied solely on the Word of God. A preacher must believe with all of his heart that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).” An indicator that a man is relying on the Word of God in preaching is that his preaching is an exposition and application of the biblical text.²³ The authority of the preacher rises and falls with his manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture.

A third ministry principle I considered as I implemented this series was my reliance on the Spirit of God. This means that I must preach in the power that God supplies. I could not and would not rely on my own intellect or oratory skills. There is something greater and more powerful on which I depend: the Holy Spirit of God. John Piper says, “All true Christian preaching is rooted in a feeling of desperation.”²⁴ This is a feeling of total dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God in every aspect of a preacher’s

²² Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith In an Age of Skepticism*, 191.

²³ Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 44.

²⁴ Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 41.

life. The Bible says that for the follower of Christ, the Spirit of God lives inside them. It is His job to guide the Christian to truth and righteousness. A preacher must be sensitive to the Spirit of God in his preaching ministry. The two things that guide us in truth are the Spirit of God and the Word of God. The beautiful thing is that the two will never disagree. It is the Spirit that inspired the Word and it is the same Spirit that illumines the Word and applies it to the hearts of people. It is also the same Spirit that gives the preacher power in the pulpit to proclaim the Word with effectiveness and fire. Apart from a reliance on the Holy Spirit in preaching, lives will never be eternally transformed for God's glory. This is a reliance and admission to the Lord that without him a preacher can do nothing. John 15:5 says, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

The development and implementation of this project was pure joy for me. As I relied on the Word of God and the Spirit of God in sermon preparation and delivery, I found myself enriched by the depth of my study. Once the structure of the sermon took shape, I added illustrations and application that help bring the roles and responsibilities of each family member to light.

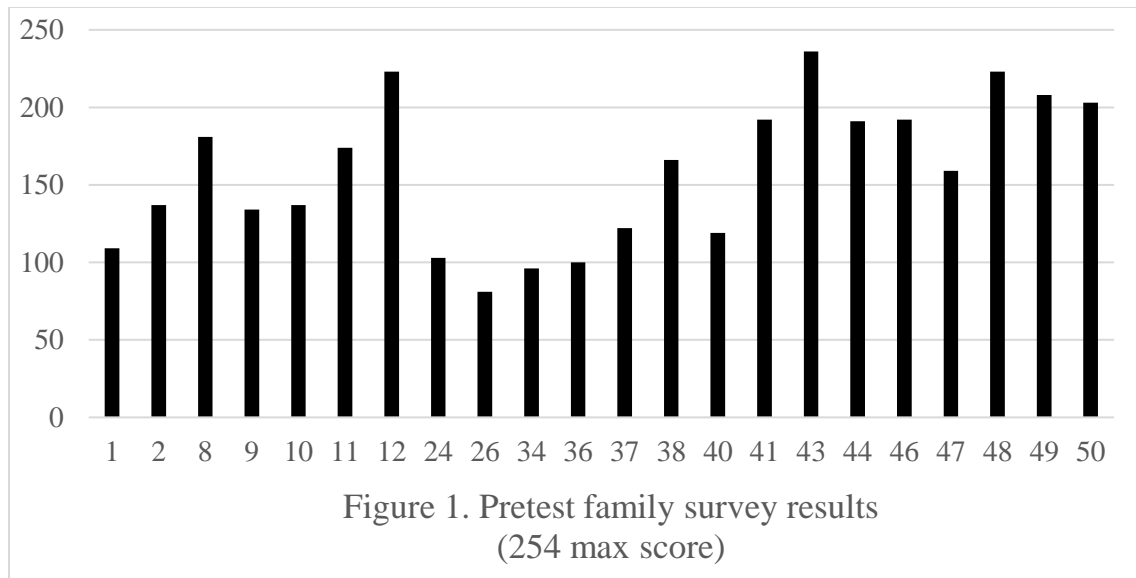
Analysis of Survey and Evaluation Data

The collection and evaluation of data for this ministry project has provided helpful insight in regard to the current understanding of the family at Walnut Street Baptist Church.

Family survey results. The family survey is a forty-five question tool utilizing a Likert-scale six-point measuring system. The participants responded to statements that evaluated their biblical knowledge and their understanding of the roles of each family member. The survey was given to twenty-two church members at Walnut Street Baptist Church. The maximum score for the entire survey is two-hundred fifty-four points. As a combined score of both biblical knowledge and individual role practice in the family, the

22 individuals who responded on the pretest scored ranging from a high of 236 and a low of 81.

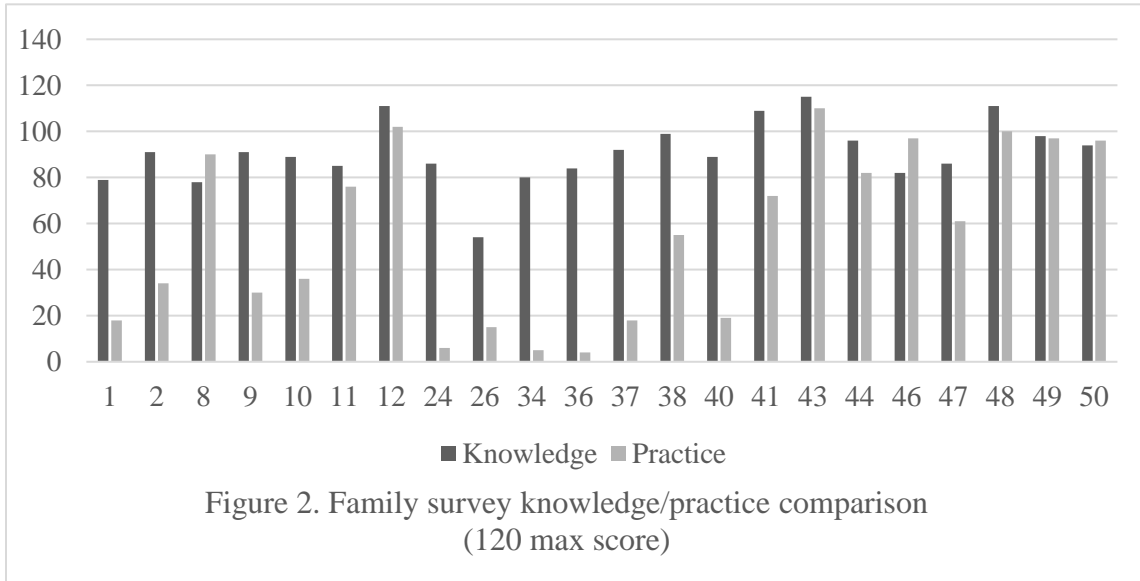
Figure 1. Pretest family survey results



In addition to the overall scores, the family survey also revealed a difference between the biblical knowledge and the current practices of family roles within each family. The comparison of knowledge and practice reveal that the Bible knowledge was sufficient, however, the application of that knowledge was not as well established in the implementation of that knowledge. Figure 2 revealed a definite difference between knowing and practicing. The total points available for the Bible knowledge portion of the survey totaled 120 points, and several of the individuals scored well on the pretest ranging from a high of 115 to a low of 19. Only 4 of the 22 responders had stronger practices than their declared Bible knowledge, and the other 18 had a decrease in their practices. The family roles practice portion of the survey also had a maximum score of 120 points, and the scores ranged in the pretest from a high of 110 to a low of just 5. The

pretest survey reveals that even though the individuals surveyed had a sufficient foundation of Bible knowledge in regard to the family, the application and practice of that knowledge needs to be addressed.

Figure 2. Family survey knowledge/practice comparison



Family survey T-test results. The same 22 people who received the pretest family survey also participated in the post-test family survey. Based upon the analysis of the results, there was a noticeable increase in the means: the Bible knowledge before the sermon series totaled 158.45 points out of a max score of 240. The Bible knowledge increased to a total of 173.5 points after the four-week sermon series was presented at WSBC.

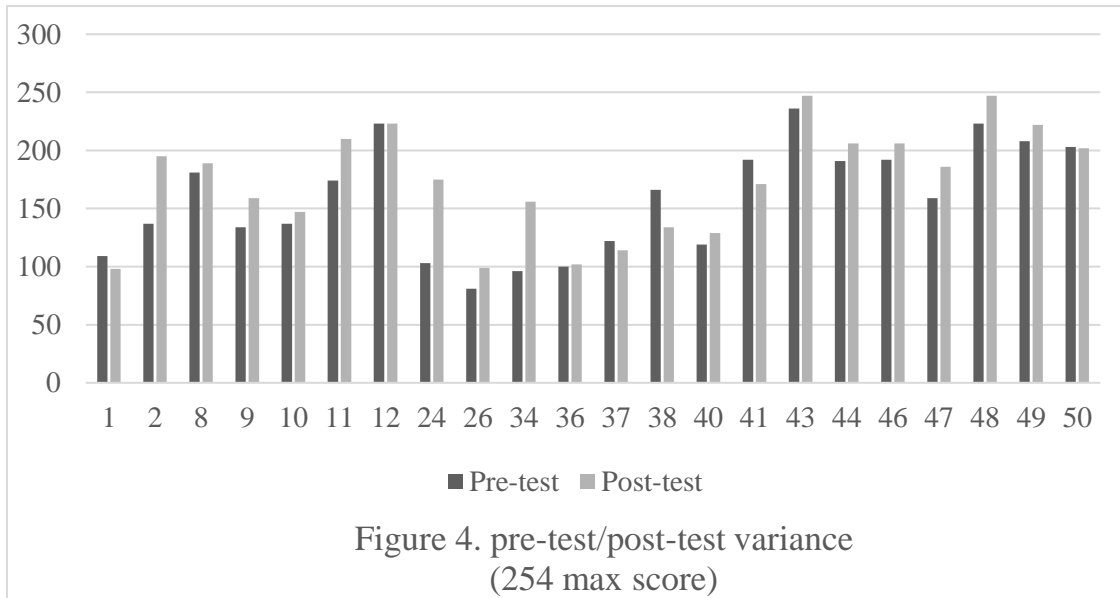
Next, based upon the data analysis, the teaching of each family member’s role in the family made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of his/her Bible knowledge ($t_{(21)}=2.796, p<.011$). The absolute value of the t Stat is 2.796; the critical 2 tail variable is 2.079. The result is an increase in Bible knowledge.

Table 1. T-Test paired two sample for means

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	158.4545455	173.5
Variance	2197.307359	2161.595238
Observations	22	22
Pearson Correlation	0.853913305	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	21	
t Stat	-2.796276696	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.005409792	
t Critical one-tail	1.720742903	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.010819584	
t Critical two-tail	2.079613845	

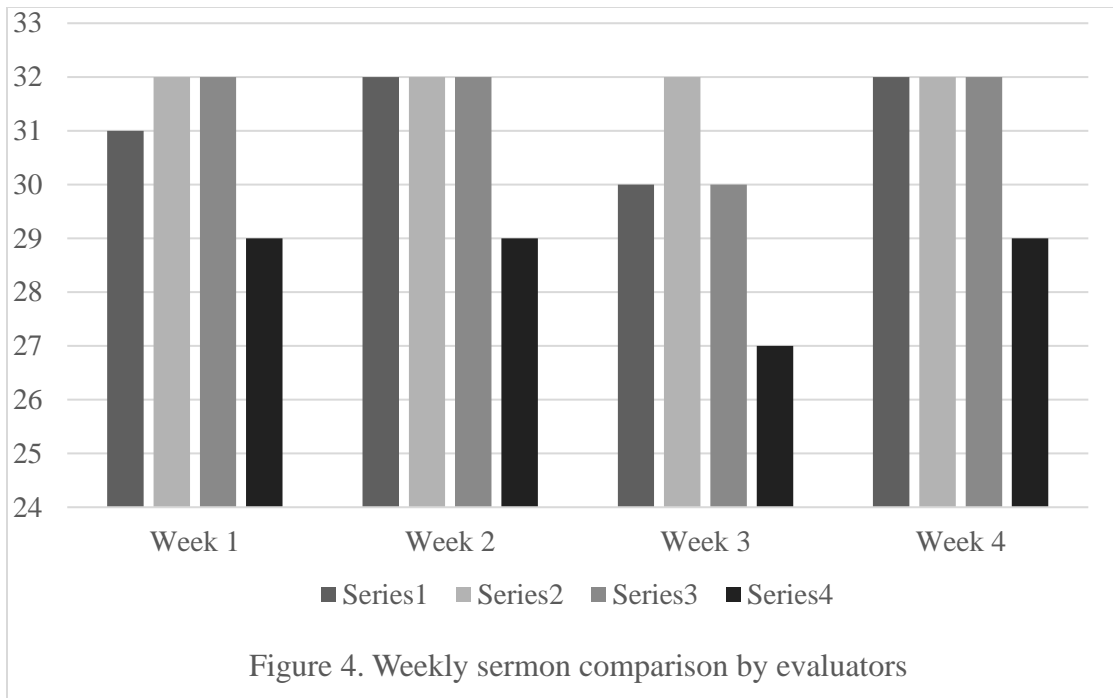
The survey and sermon series was designed to test the knowledge of WSBC members to determine if the sermon series would have an impact on their understanding of God's Word and embrace the God-given roles to each family member in the home. The sermon series was developed to equip all WSBC members to fulfill their God-given roles within the home. The t-test figure 1 is based upon the completed responses of individuals taking the pre-test prior to the first message of the sermon series. Figure 3 compares the individual scores of the pre-test and post-test responses. Several individuals recorded significant increase in their overall score.

Figure 4. Pre-test/post-test variance



Sermon series evaluations. The four messages in the sermon series were evaluated by four individuals. Two of those individuals are ministerial staff at WSBC while the other two are lay leaders. Their input and encouragement was valuable in analyzing the teaching aspect of the project. Each week the evaluators were given a sermon evaluation rubric and were present when the message was delivered to the church. Following each message, they completed the evaluation form and submitted it to me at the end of the series. Based upon their evaluations, the scores ranged from a high of 128 (out of a total of 128 points) to a low of 114. The scores transposed into percentages ranged from a 100 percent high to an 89.1 percent low. The percentage scores according to the week the message was given are as follows: Week 1 – 96.9 percent, Week 2 – 97.7 percent, Week 3 – 92.9 percent, and Week 4 – 97.7 percent. For the series as a whole, the first evaluator scored a 125, the second 128 points, the third 126 points, and the fourth 114 points.

Figure 4. Weekly sermon comparison by evaluators



Conclusion

The development and implementation of this ministry project was a delight. Constructive feedback from the evaluators was encouraging and helpful. The foundation for the project was laid in chapters 2 and 3, giving clarity and direction to the project. Overall, the completed project was a fruitful experience for WSBC as well as for me.

CHAPTER 5

THE EVALUATION OF THE FAMILY ROLES MINISTRY PROJECT AT WALNUT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

The family ministry project at WSBC has been a three-year journey. The research, development and implementation of the ministry project have aided in the growth of WSBC regarding each family member's roles and responsibilities. The current ministry context dictated much of this project since the family is one of the many struggles at WSBC. This project addressed some of those needs and was used as a springboard to launch into other church-related complementarian struggles in the future. The development of the sermon series was both informative and uplifting. The verbal and written feedback from evaluators and those participating in the family survey was equally helpful. The most rewarding part of the entire project was the final survey results. It was a joy to see how the knowledge of individuals regarding their understanding of the family changed after the preaching of the family sermon series. Overall, the challenging and encouraging project provided an assurance as to how the Word of God will continue to work in the hearts of the people of WSBC.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of equipping family members to fulfill their God-given roles and responsibilities at WSBC has received a positive response, mainly because deep down each family desires to picture the gospel and reflect God's glory. The surveys and evaluations revealed an increase in WSBC's understanding of the family. This project was entirely appropriate for WSBC because many have a warped view of what the Bible teaches about the family. This project also revealed that although many individuals had a

sufficient grasp of the Bible, practical application of that knowledge appeared to be lacking. The purpose of this project was simple and elementary to most evangelicals; however, there is still a need to continue teaching God's standard for the family. The purpose of this project was vital to the implementation of a biblical church government structure that will be addressed at a later date. This project's purpose serves as the framework for the future.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal to assess accurately WSBC's understanding of the family and the individual roles of each family member was accomplished. The survey was carefully crafted and designed for the participants to think through every family member's role. The survey gathered information regarding each individual's knowledge and practice in the home. The pre-test survey indicated many areas that the sermon series was designed to address.

The second goal of the project to develop a four-week sermon series on the family from Colossians 3:18-21 that increased WSBC's knowledge of the family was accomplished. Preparing and delivering the sermon series was one of the highlights of this project because it allowed me to apply practically the research from previous chapters. The biblical exegesis was tethered to Colossians 3:18-21, and the gap was bridged from New Testament times to our day.

The third goal of observing the families of WSBC affirming the biblical principles of the family through their increased knowledge was successfully met. In reaching this goal, I was reminded once again how powerful the Word of God is as the Spirit applies the Word to the people. Seeing a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test survey results, I was overjoyed at the impact expository preaching had on our church. Often a pastor wonders if his pulpit ministry is making a difference in the hearts and lives of his congregation. Observing the results of this ministry project served as a

boost of encouragement that reminded me of the power and might of our great God.

Each of the three goals in this project was measured by the methods and qualifications described in chapter 1; therefore, with the assistance of individual members of WSBC and selected sermon evaluators, the goals have been successfully measured and accomplished.

Strengths of the Project

This ministry project was designed to equip each family member in fulfilling his/her God-given role and responsibility in the home. The standard for how one's Christian home is to function is found in the Word of God. The primary strength of this project was the commitment to the Scriptures that formulates our understanding, knowledge and practical application of God's intended design for each family. This ministry project did not seek to communicate the culture's understanding of the family or a preacher's opinion about the family, rather, Creator God's intention in designing the family to reflect His glory and display the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A second strength of this ministry project was the deep impact it had on my personal life. When I was deciding on a ministry project topic, I wanted to study a topic that would benefit both the church I pastor as well as my own personal life. In addition to my relationship with Christ, my greatest desire is to be the best husband and father I can be for God's glory. A topic on the family seemed fitting since my family is my greatest priority. As I began to study and research, I became convicted and encouraged at the same time. I realized how short I have fallen from the ideal husband and father God has called me to be. At the same time, however, I was encouraged by being able to better understand God's commands as they relate to me as a husband and father.

A third strength of this ministry project was to accurately assess the biblical understanding of the family among members of WSBC. This assessment was crucial not only to the fulfillment of this ministry project, but also for ongoing conversations and

continued instruction. Any time a pastor can gain a better understanding of where his congregation falls on crucial matters of Christianity, he can be better prepared to address those matters long term.

A fourth strength of this ministry project was the conversations that began to take place during the implementation process. A significant number of the congregants who took part in the survey began to ask additional questions as a result of the survey and the sermon series. Seeing individuals thinking about the family on a deeper level brought joy to my heart. To this day, those conversations are still taking place and it is allowing our leadership to speak truth into those situations.

A final strength of this project was the practicality of this study. This study was intensely practical and relevant to almost every person at WSBC because whether they want to admit it or not, they desire for their families to reflect God's glory. They want to be the kind of husbands and wives God has called them to be. They want children who obey them and they want to encourage their children as well.

Weaknesses of the Project

Reflecting upon this ministry project, I have discovered a few weaknesses that I would address if given the opportunity to implement this project again. First, the development of the survey could have been more direct and specific, including provisions for individuals who are widowed, divorced, or never been married. Multiple questions were directed to individuals assuming these individuals were currently married. This did not allow for each individual to answer all of the questions in the survey. The questions should have been reworded in such a way that each individual would be able to answer the question even if he/she was not currently married. However, there also needed to be a practical aspect to the questioning for married individuals to be able to comment.

A second weakness flows from the first weakness. In both the survey and the sermon series, some family members were not represented. For example, the practical

portion of the survey made no provision for singles or divorced persons. This is mainly due to the nature of Colossians 3:18-21 which does not address any of those family members. Desiring to be faithful to the text, I chose to stay tethered to Colossians 3:18-21 and not specifically address singleness and divorce, though I did write about those situations in chapter 2 as cultural issues impacting today's family. Upon further consideration, I should have included a few questions that were geared toward the singles and divorced persons taking the survey.

The final weakness I recognize was the challenge of ongoing implementation. This is a challenge in any area of ministry as a pastor seeks to get biblical principles etched in the hearts and minds of his people. I do not believe the mindset of the people of WSBC will change long term just because we walked through four weeks of sermons on the family. This is something that must be taught and re-taught for years to come. Given the nature of this project over an allotted period of time, it is not possible to see completely the results this journey has commenced.

Theological Reflections

Reflecting upon the research, study, and implementation of this research project, several theological thoughts came to the forefront of my mind that will have a lasting impact on my pastoral ministry. First, this project was a friendly reminder that God has a specific design for the way a family is to function. In this day and age when there are so many cultural shifts impacting the family, it is reassuring to think deeply about the way God has designed the family to function. This design has not changed because God has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His Word stands the test of time, the attacks of critics, and the disobedience of mankind. The Creator of the universe and everything in it has a plan and a purpose for each family. This is a radical thought and immensely moving to contemplate. The family is not a random coincidence or an institution that was devised by man; rather, it is designed by God for

our good and for His glory.

A second theological reflection from this ministry project is the fact that the commands given to each individual family member are obedience issues. The imperatives given in Colossians 3:18-21 are not just for intellectual prowess or suggestions from a smorgasbord of options. They are commands to be obeyed. A family is not free to pick and choose which commands they will obey and which ones they will reject. A husband cannot rightly agree that a wife should submit to her husband, a child obey his parents, and parents train their children without also agreeing that he must love his wife as Christ loves the church. Each command for each family member fits hand in glove with God's design for the family as a whole.

A final theological reflection from this ministry project is the absolute confidence (as seen in the survey results) that the Word of God is powerful to bring change into the hearts and lives of those who hear it. Often a pastor will wonder whether or not his preaching has an impact on his people. Observing the survey results and the significant growth in bible knowledge was a pleasant reminder that God speaks through His Word and through it will bring about lasting change.

Personal Reflections

One of the greatest issues facing WSBC today is how the family is to function and what each family member's role is in that family. One of the greatest desires I have for my family is that we fulfill God's design. Putting these two common threads together, this ministry project was a blessing both to WSBC and to our family personally. As I ponder what God has done through our family over the past fifteen years of ministry, I am reminded of a desire that still rings true today, my wife and I have a heartfelt desire to be available and useable where God has placed us at this moment. We have dreams for our marriage, our children, and our ministry. This project aided in the development process to make these desires a reality.

My wife, Jessica, and I were married on August 4, 2007. As with many newlyweds, the first few years of our marriage were dedicated to adjusting to married life. No longer could we be selfish and focus solely on ourselves. We were forced to consider each other in every aspect of our lives. Our marriage strengthened over the years as we began to understand each other more fully. One thing has remained true in our marriage as the years have gone: I love her more today than I did yesterday. As I studied for this project, I was overwhelmed with a sense of failure as well as a sense of hope. Studying God's design for me as a husband, I realized how short I have fallen from His desire, but also ways that I have brought glory to Him in the way I love Jessica. My single goal as a husband is to love Jessica the way Christ loves His church. She is my best friend and I want to love her every day with a sacrificial, steadfast, and securing love. The research and preparation for this project helped me to understand my role as a husband in ways that I had never considered.

This study has strengthened me as a father as well. We have two children, Madelyn and Noah. I believe every father desires to be a good father, even those who may not know the Lord. It is amazing how many teachable moments a mom and dad has with their kids throughout the years. Parents need wisdom and discernment in order to rear their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This ministry project has allowed me to slow down and really consider and pray through my responsibility as a father. I was able to seriously evaluate the way I lead my family and areas that must be improved in me as a father in order for the Williams family to be what God wants us to be.

God called me to be a pastor. I love this calling and I cannot see myself doing anything else. Our family would not be happy in any other way. We are confident in our calling and that is precisely what keeps us in the ministry. I am wired to preach and see God's people growing in their relationship with Him. As I reviewed the results of the pre

and post surveys, I was extremely encouraged to see the impact the Word of God had on the lives of the people at WSBC. It was a great reminder that God can and does use men like me to be change agents in the lives of others for His glory.

Conclusion

As I consider this ministry project as a whole, I am overwhelmed with a sense of accomplishment and the understanding that there is still much work to be completed. I have personally gained much from this project. It has been a blessing to our church as well as to my family. With this project laying the foundation for future teaching efforts regarding the structure and function of the church, I am very pleased with the outcome. My prayer is that this will offer a springboard into further change for WSBC that will help her become the church God wants her to be.

APPENDIX 1
FAMILY SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of your family. This research is being conducted by Mark Williams for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

Part 1: Introduction

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?
 A. Yes
 B. No

2. Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation?
 A. Yes
 B. No

3. Are you married?
 A. Yes
 B. No

4. Do you have any children age 18 or younger living in the home?
 A. Yes
 B. No

5. What is your age in years?
 A. 18-24
 B. 25-34
 C. 35-44
 D. 45-54
 E. 55-64
 F. 65 and over

Directions: Answer the following questions using the following scale:
SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat,
A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

Part 2: The Bible teaches.....

6. Parents are to train their children	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. Divorce and remarriage is permitted for any and every reason.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. Children should be the parent's ultimate priority.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. Single-parent families cannot bring glory to God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. Women are to provide leadership in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. Men are the ultimate authority in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. Men and women's roles are interchangeable in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. Same-sex relationships are permitted as long as two people love each other.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. A divorced family cannot bring glory to God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. The husband is to love his wife unconditionally.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. Children are to obey their parents.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. Men and women have different roles in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. The wife is the spiritual leader in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves His church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. Gender does not disqualify a woman from leading in her home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. Parents are to disciple their children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. Men and women are equally created in the image of God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

23. The wife is to submit to the loving leadership of her husband. SD D DS AS A SA

24. Men and women have the same roles in the home. SD D DS AS A SA

25. The husband is the spiritual leader in the home. SD D DS AS A SA

Part 3: Practical

26. The husband is the leader in my home. SD D DS AS A SA

27. I know what it means for the wife to submit to her husband. SD D DS AS A SA

28. I can clearly articulate how my marriage brings glory to God. SD D DS AS A SA

29. I want my family to be a picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. SD D DS AS A SA

30. I feel positive in my marriage. SD D DS AS A SA

31. My spouse and I have differences we can't resolve. SD D DS AS A SA

32. My spouse and I discuss spiritual matters. SD D DS AS A SA

33. If the husband is the leader, that makes the wife inferior. SD D DS AS A SA

34. I seek to serve in the church with my spouse. SD D DS AS A SA

35. I know what it looks like for a wife to follow her husband. SD D DS AS A SA

36. My family is a picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. SD D DS AS A SA

37. The husband desires to lead my family. SD D DS AS A SA

38. I use everyday situations as opportunities to instruct my children with biblical principles. SD D DS AS A SA

39. The husband is the spiritual leader in my home. SD D DS AS A SA

40. I believe God wants me to honor my SD D DS AS A SA

parents.

41. The husband is an effective spiritual leader in my home. SD D DS AS A SA

42. I understand what the Bible teaches regarding how to raise my children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. SD D DS AS A SA

43. I know what it means for a husband to be the spiritual leader. SD D DS AS A SA

44. I could instruct another man how to be the spiritual leader in his home. SD D DS AS A SA

45. I can clearly articulate how my marriage reflects the Gospel of Jesus Christ. SD D DS AS A SA

Personal Identification Number:_____

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC

Sermon Evaluation Tool					
Sermon Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon was clearly relevant to the issue of marriage and the family.					
The sermon was faithful to the Bible’s teaching on marriage and the family.					
The sermon was theologically sound.					
The aim of the sermon was clearly stated.					
The points of the sermon clearly support the aim.					
The sermon contains points of practical application.					
The sermon was sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the sermon was clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 3

COLOSSIANS 3:18-21 SERMON SERIES

The four messages for the Colossians 3:18-21 family sermon series in manuscript form.

God's Glory in the Home Sermon Series
"The Role of the Wife for God's Glory"
Colossians 3:18

Introduction:

1. This morning we are beginning a new series on the family. Specifically, every family member's role within the family. We are going to address Husbands, wives, children and parents.
2. And we are calling this series, "God's Glory in the Home." I want to tell you at the outset why this series is so important for your family. God desires for your family to reflect His glory. To simply show off His glory and reflect His gospel. And the way the family does that is by every family member fulfilling their God-given role and taking care of their God-given responsibility.
3. We find this in Colossians 3:18-21. And today, we are beginning with Colossians 3:18 and here Paul deals specifically with the wife.

Colossians 3:18= "18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

Main point: The wife who voluntarily submits to her husband's leadership glorifies God and reflects the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. This is not the politically correct thing to say. I also understand that there are some of you who may even be offended by the fact that I just said that. I am well aware that the wife in today's family is under incredible pressure. And impossible expectations.
2. Wives, you have unrealistic expectations for yourself. Your children have unrealistic expectations for you. Add to that the expectations your husband has for you.
3. So my question this morning that we are going to answer in Colossians 3:18 is this: What role is the wife to play in the family so that family reflects the gospel and displays His glory? Because when you ask God, "Well God, what is your expectation for me to reflect the gospel and display your glory?" God says, "I simply want you to respect your husband by voluntarily submitting to his leadership."
4. And wives, how you look at your husband will determine how you live with your husband. Respecting your husband and submitting to his leadership begins with how you look at him.

ILL= Do you look at your husband as someone that God has placed in your life as the leader of your family that you are going to respect and follow regardless or in spite of all his faults and failures? Or, do you look at your husband and say to him, "I will respect you and follow you if I think you deserve it?" Or "if I think you are taking us in the right direction?" "or if you meet certain conditions?"

2. Now, God means what he says. God expect respect. God says to every wife, “I want you to glorify me and reflect my gospel by respecting your husband and voluntarily submitting to his leadership.” There are two simple things we learn from Colossians 3:18 to make that a reality. #1

I. Wives Are To Give Their Voluntary Submission To Their Husbands.

Colossians 3:18= “¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

1. That word “submit” literally means to “place yourself under.” Or “to subject yourself under the authority of someone else.” But this text is very simple. “Wives.” That isn’t too hard to figure out whether it applies to you or not.

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

1. It is absolutely mind-boggling what a problematic area that is today. I don’t know how people can confuse that kind of statement. There are people today who are denying that this needs to be true. There are books being written all the time by supposedly evangelical people who deny this. Let me give you a few ways they deny it.

A. Some today are saying that a wife doesn’t necessarily have to be a woman. They are saying that a wife can be a man.

B. And others are saying that this is not really the Spirit speaking that this is just Paul waxing into his chauvinistic act. That Paul had this thing against women. And he just let it all out once in a while. That it just doesn’t belong there, that it is an unfortunate mistake.

C. And then there is another group coming along who say, “Well, you have to interpret this culturally. You see, in that culture, they didn’t want women upsetting the society. And that society was an authority/submission society, but that is all cultural.”

Well, my bible says, “Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.”

1. Is that cultural too? I don’t need to love my wife, that’s cultural. That’s not 21st century, that was then. Or maybe Christ only loved the church then, how about that? And he doesn’t love it now? You see, that doesn’t make sense at all.

2. Contrary to what some people would tell you, it is not a cultural issue. It is not a sociological issue. It is not a philosophical issue. It is not an intellectual issue. It is a spiritual issue. Because you can’t have it both ways.

3. If I were to say to every wife in here, “Do you believe that your husband ought to love you the way that God says he ought to love you?” You would say, “Absolutely.” If I were

to say to every wife in here, “Do you think your kids should obey you the way God wants them to obey you?” You would say, “Absolutely.” If I were to say to you, “Do you believe every parent and every mom and dad ought to lead their children the way God wants them to lead them?” You would say, “Absolutely.”

4. Well, if you are going to agree with that, you can’t take the other part and say, “Well, I don’t believe I have to submit to my husband.” Because it all fits, hand in glove. You can’t believe one thing and then not believe the other.

5. Now, let me anticipate right now some of the objections that are out there. Let’s just get some things on the table. I am, in no way inferring or implying that women are, in any way, inferior to men by the fact that they are to submit to their leadership. Just because someone is under the authority of someone else does not mean that person is inferior to the person who is over them.

6. For example, if you know your Biblical theology, you know how foolish that would be?

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:3= “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

1. Now, anybody who knows biblical theology knows that the Bible never, ever implies or infers or states that God the Son is inferior to God the Father. Because He is not. God the Son is coequal with God the Father. God the Son is coeternal with God the father. God the son is every bit as much God as is God the father.

2. But the only reason that you and I even have a half a chance at going to heaven is because God the Son, in the Garden of Gethsemane, submitted himself to the leadership of the father. And even though he did not want to go to the cross. He did not want to go and die.

He said, “Nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done.”

1. And if he had not submitted to his father’s leadership. If he would have said, that one time, “I’ve done everything else you have asked me to do. I am not doing this.” You and I would have absolutely no chance at going to heaven.

2. Now, furthermore, let me just say a word to the husbands. This is something you can’t force on your wife. You can’t bully your wife into this. You can’t coerce your wife into this. In the Greek language. In the Greek syntax, this is in the middle voice

And what that literally says is this, “Wives, submit yourselves.”

1. This is something the wife has to do voluntarily. You cannot make her submit. Let me tell you the difference. Children have to obey their parents. And they ought to be

disciplined if they don't. You can't make a wife submit to her husband. And you can't discipline her if she doesn't. It is something you have to do voluntarily.

2. When I talk about submitting to your husbands, I don't mean that in an absolute sense. And here is what I mean by that. I am assuming that you are married to a husband that would never ask you to do anything that is ungodly. Or unbiblical. Or unethical. Or immoral.

3. You've got to enable your husband's leadership by voluntarily being willing. You say, "What do you mean?"

ILL= John Maxwell put it best when he said, "If you want to know whether or not you are leading, just look behind you and see if someone is following. If nobody is following, you are just taking a walk."

1. No man can make his wife follow him. You've got to enable his leadership by voluntarily being willing. Because that is what God wants, for you to follow his leadership.

2. And when he says, "Wives, submit." This isn't the idea that the husband is firing out orders and you are obeying. That is not the idea at all. It's the idea that you have a spirit of submissiveness.

3. Now you say, "Well, why does he say "your own." Does he think women are going to go around submitting to everybody's husband? No. I think the idea of "own" here is to emphasize that this is a personal, intimate, inward, vital relationship. He's saying submit to your own husband. This is the man you own. This is yours. This is your possession. You are not just submitting to some indifferent, detached authority. This is your own husband. You possess him, he possesses you. There is something very intimate and personal here. And that submission is in love.

II. Wives Are To Give Their Wholehearted Adoration To Their Lord.

You see, that is why Paul added the second part of that verse.

Verse 18= "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

1. The only justification for this is that this is the way God intended it. This is the way God invented it. Christianity has got to work in the home before it can work in the world. That word "fitting" means "this is what is proper." "This is what is right."

2. Paul does not tell the wife, "You submit to your husband because he is the husband." He doesn't say, "You submit to your husband because he is the boss." He doesn't say, "You submit to your husband because he is the man and you are the woman." He doesn't say that. He says, "You submit to your husband because this is what God wants." "This is what is proper."

“This is what is fitting in the Lord.”

1. Your respect for your husband is not based on his personality. It is not based on his performance. It is based on his position. He is your husband.

ILL= There is a saying in the Military, “You salute the uniform, not the person in the uniform.”

1. It is the position. And you see this in everyday life. Citizens submit to policemen. Because of their position. Employees submit to their employers. Because of their position. Children obey their parents. Because of their position. Wives respect their husbands. Because of their position.

2. Ladies, if you don't voluntarily submit to the leadership of your husband, you are not just going to have problems with God, which is bad enough. You are not just going to have problems with your husband. You are going to have big time problems with your children.

3. If you teach your children, by example, to rebel against God given authority. Then you know what they are going to do? They are going to rebel against God given authority. God knows what he is doing.

4. When the husband loves his wife the way he ought to love his wife. Even though he is over her in authority, you know what he is teaching his kids? He is teaching his kids how to handle people and relate to people who will someday be under them.

5. When the wife respects the husband, and follows his leadership. She is teaching the children how to be respectful and to respond to people who are over them. And parents, you will never teach your kids more important lessons than these two lessons. How to be over and how to be under.

6. You can never teach them how to be over until you first teach them how to be under. You will never be a person in authority that knows how to handle authority until you know how to be under authority and respond to authority.

7. So when you respect your husband and you follow his leadership, you are doing, not just what is best for you and what is best for your husband. You are doing what is best for your family. That is why it is so important, ladies, encourage your husband's leadership. Affirm him every chance you get. Let me tell you why this is such a big deal.

ILL= I am a Pastor. I want affirmation from the people I Pastor. Let me tell you. I can do without your affirmation. I can do without the affirmation of my staff. I can do without the affirmation of other pastors of other churches. But let me tell you something.

2. That lady sitting right there on the front row. I am dead without her affirmation. If she doesn't believe in me, nothing else matters. If she is not behind me, nothing else matters.

If she is not watching my back, nothing else matters. If she does not have confidence in me. As a pastor. As a preacher. As a Christian. As a husband. As a man of God. As a father. Nothing else really matters. I have got to have her behind me. I have got to have her respecting me. I have got to have her proud of me more than anything else. And see, this is what is so unbelievable.

3. The average wife doesn't even understand how much influence they have over their husbands. I am going to put it to you this way. Ladies, you can make him or you can break him. It is just that simple. I don't care what he gets at work. I don't care what he gets with the guys. You can make him or you can break him.

3. So I just want to give you some suggestions. Every week I am going try and make this as practical as I can. Let me just give you wives some suggestions, some things you can do, maybe this week or next week or down the road that will really help you encourage your husband and his leadership.

A. Take an opportunity either verbally or by writing a note to him to tell him how much you appreciate all that he does for you as a husband.

B. When you get a chance and he is with some of his buddies, and the opportunity arises, brag on him. Just affirm him and tell them what a great husband he is.

C. Make it a point to always be supportive of his decisions in front of the children.

D. Go out of your way to do something that he normally would not expect you to do.

E. When is the last time you got all the kids together in the room with you husband. And just said to your kids, "Do you realize what a great dad we have?" "Do you realize what a great man your dad is?" "Do you realize, all these things we have. The roof over your head. The food on the table. The clothes we wear. You know, Dad works hard for that."

4. If you will just respect your husbands by submitting to his leadership as God would have you to do. You will be happier. He will be happier. Your children will be happier. Your home will be blessed. And you will find that your family will display God's glory and reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God's Glory in the Home Sermon Series
"The Role of the Husband for God's Glory"
Colossians 3:19

Introduction:

1. Go ahead and grab your bibles and find Colossians 3:19. We are in the middle of a series called "God's Glory in the Home." And today we are looking at the husbands. We all have expectations for our spouses. And God knows that. God knows what the husband expects out of the wife. And God knows what the wife expects out of the husband.
2. God desires for your family to reflect the Gospel and display His glory. That is what God wants out of your family and mine.
3. The question today that I want every husband in this room and every single man in this room to answer is this question: When it comes to marriage, what does God expect from me? What is my role? What is my responsibility in the family?
4. In Colossians 3:19, God only has one expectation for the husband. God expects the husband to give his wife unconditional love. He doesn't expect you to provide a certain lifestyle. He doesn't expect you to provide a certain type of house. Or a certain type of car. Or a brand-named clothing. There is nothing wrong with working to provide all those things.
5. But above all, God has commanded husbands to love their wives unconditionally.

Colossians 3:19= "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them."

What this literally says is, "You husbands keep on loving your wives and stop being bitter toward them."

1. You husbands keep on, continually loving your wives and stop being bitter toward them. There are really two commands there. #1, keep on loving your wives. Often, this isn't the case, unfortunately. All the love is there before the marriage, and then, when the marriage happens, all the love seems to drain away. And what comes in its place is bitterness.

He says, "Keep on loving your wives."

1. You loved them before you married them; you loved them when you married them; you loved them for a while after you married them. Keep on loving them. Sounds simple. And God says, "Men, if you meet this one expectation that I have for you, you can help your family reflect the Gospel and display My glory."
2. When you really start digging underneath what Paul had to say in that text, you find just how profound his advice really is. Because men, if we are going to love our wives.

And single men, if you are going to love your future wife the way you ought to love her. According to this text, you have to love her 3 different ways.

I. Husbands Are To Love Their Wives Unconditionally.

1. When Paul wrote these words in the early church, husbands jaws would have dropped all over that church. In the Greek culture of that day, husbands had no responsibilities to the family at all. They could come and go as they pleased. If they didn't like the way the wife looked or the way the wife dressed or the way the wife cooked. They could divorce the wife and there was no question asked. The idea that a husband had a responsibility to his wife or to the home, was totally foreign in Paul's day.

When Paul said to the church, "Husbands, you love your wives."

1. Husbands had never, ever heard that in their lives. It sounds simple." But it is very profound. Even the verb that Paul used would have caught everybody's attention. In the Greek language there is more than one word for love.

2. There is the word "Phileo." And it refers to the type of emotional affection that can come or it can go. That is the kind of love that you can have one day and lose the next. That is not the word that Paul uses here.

3. There is another word. And it is a word for sexual love. It is "eros." We get the word "erotic" from that word. That is not the word that Paul used here either.

4. Paul used a word for love that was very rarely used in the culture of that day. It is the verb "agape." Agape love is an unconditional love that one person gives to another person, expecting nothing in return.

5. Real love does not say to the wife, "I will love you if you do this or if you do that." Real love does not say, "I will love you since you did this or since you did that." Real love does not say, "I will love you because you have done this or because you have done that."

6. The kind of love that Paul is talking about is the kind of love where the man says to the wife, "I love you regardless of whether you do or whether you don't. I love you regardless of whether you did or whether you didn't. I love you regardless of whether you have done something or you haven't done anything."

7. The kind of love that God wants the husband to have for the wife is not a love of passion that dies out when the physical attraction dies out. The kind of love Paul talks about here is the love of the will. It is literally a love that refuses to die.

ILL= Someone put it this way, "The love that existed from the start of the marriage is the love that should continue throughout the marriage."

1. When a man loves his wife the way he ought to love his wife, he will say to his wife, “I am going to walk a godly walk. And I am going to talk a godly talk. And I am going to model for you the kind of love that I know God has for you and that God has for me. In every given situation, I am willing to apply God’s word to my heart to be the husband that God has called me to be so that I can help our family reflect the gospel and bring glory to God.”

2. How do you know whether or not you have a spiritual love for your wife? How can I know whether or not I have an unconditional love for my wife? #2

II. Husbands Are To Love Their Wives Sacrificially.

The word there that Paul used for love, the word “Agape.” Love is activity. It is the act of self-sacrifice. But, don’t let what was love turn into bitterness.

That is the same word that John used for love in one of the greatest verses in the Bible, John 3:16. “For God so loved.” The word there is “agape.”

“For God so loved the world.”

1. Now, how do we know God loved the world? How do I know God loves me like God says he loves me? Here is how I know it. “That He gave his only begotten son.”

2. I know God loves me because he sacrificed his own son to pay for my sins. That is why the love that I am talking about is not an emotional love. It is not just an affectionate love. It is not just a love of passion. It is a love that refuses to die. The kind of love I am talking about is when the marriage is at its lowest and your emotional love tank is completely empty.

3. It is a love that says, “I am going to fight through this feeling. I am going to conquer this circumstance. I am going to deal with this disappointment. And I am going to stay the course.” You cannot love your wife the way God wants you to love your wife if you are not willing to make a sacrifice.

4. If you are not willing to sacrifice some things that may be very important to you, you are not going to love your wife the way God wants you to. Because the type of love that I am talking about is the love that Jesus Christ has shown for the church.

Ephesians 5= “Husbands love your wives.” Then he tells us how to do it. “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

1. Jesus loved the church so much that he gave his life for the church. He died for the church. I am not talking about you dying physically. You have to die to what you want from her so that you can focus on what God wants for you. You don’t love your wife the way you ought to love your wife until you love her more than you love your own life.

2. For you to love your wife the way God wants you to love your wife, you've got to give the death penalty to everything you want from her. In every situation with your wife, I want you to start asking yourself one question. Every time you get to those difficult times. Here is the key question God wants every husband to ask. What is the loving thing to do? If you love your wife unconditionally. And you love your wife sacrificially. Then #3

III. Husbands Are To Love Their Wives Patiently.

1. He said, "Husbands, love your wives." But then he went on to add something else. Colossians 3:19= "And do not be harsh with them." Now, why did he write that? This means, "Don't irritate your wife. Don't exasperate your wife." This word, incidentally, is only used 3 other times in the NT. And you'll find that the only time it is used, Revelation 8 one time, and two times in Revelation 10. And it has there the idea of bitterness.. something very distasteful, something very unenjoyable.

2. What Paul is really saying is this, "Don't call her honey and act like vinegar." A husband is a leader and a lover. That word "bitter" means "to lose patience with." "To get upset with." "To get frustrated with." "To be ready to throw in the towel."

3. The person we ought to be patient with the most, we are the most impatient with. The person that we lose it with the quickest is the person that we love the most. Why is it that sometimes they can so frustrate us and just so quickly get us so irritated and aggravated?

4. You know what really frustrates us, guys? Anything we don't understand. We come into this relationship and here is what we want. We look at our wife and we say, "We want you to satisfy our needs." And finally we get around to understanding, "You know what, I'll be a lot better off if, instead of trying to satisfy my needs, I'll satisfy her needs."

5. However, in order to satisfy her needs, guess what? You've got to understand what her needs are. And this is where sometimes some of us never, ever get this. Her needs are not the same as our needs.

6. Let me tell you the #1 rule you never break if you love your wife. And I am dead serious about this. Do not ever criticize your wife publicly. And do not ever criticize your wife privately to somebody else.

ILL= You know the old saying, "If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all."

1. You better hear me. That is true about your wife with another person. You affirm your wife. You brag on your wife. But you never, ever put her down.

2. So here is what I want you to do. I want to give you some homework. I want you to choose one of the following activities. You may want to choose more than one. I want you to choose at least one.

- A. Make breakfast for her and take it to her in bed.
- B. Take her to dinner, but, let her choose the restaurant.
- C. Bring her flowers for no reason at all.
- D. Give her a blank sheet of paper and let her fill out a honey do list for the day.
- E. Calendar and plan a getaway overnight and let her pick where and when.

3. Now, every man in this room can do one of those 5 things. You've got to cultivate this. You have to work at it. It is hard work. Christianity ought to affect the home. And to affect the home, it is going to have to be at the level of husband and wife.

4. Let's play pretend for just a moment. Pretend that every single marriage in America was a marriage where the husband loved his wife unconditionally. And loved his wife sacrificially. And loved his wife patiently. Just pretend that your marriage was the kind of marriage, where in every situation you would always ask this question, "What is the most loving thing to do?" And then you did it. Now can you just imagine how different your marriage would be?

5. Can you just imagine what might happen across this country? Your wife would feel like a queen. She might start treating you like a king. I know divorce rates would plummet. And your home would become a castle that no tide could ever wash away. Husbands, love your wives unconditionally. See what God can do in making your marriage a marriage that reflects the gospel and brings glory to God.

God's Glory in the Home Sermon Series
"The Role of Children for the Glory of God"
Colossians 3:20

Introduction:

1. God has a specific role that he wants every family member to play. He has a specific responsibility that he wants every family member to fulfill. Today, we are talking to young people, "kids." But God says that "kids are to honor." And kids, as you relate to your parents, the question you ought to be asking all the time is, "What is the honorable thing to do?"
2. If you are a young person and you are still living at home. Or you are in some way, shape or form, under the provision and under the provision of your parents. I want you to focus in on what God expects out of you.
3. Now, I realize that there are some of you kids here today, and you have parents who do have unrealistic expectations for you. Some of you have parents who want you to play sports. But you are not athletically gifted and you just don't want to play sports. There are some of you, maybe your parents want you to play a musical instrument. You like to listen to music, but you just don't want to play an instrument. Maybe some of you here have parents who expect you to make straight A's in school. Yet there are just certain subjects that you are just not very proficient in. There are just certain subjects that are just not your strongpoint.
4. God has one expectation of you. God expects you to honor your parents by obeying them.

Colossians 3:20= "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."

1. If you are a young person, living at home, under the provision and care of your parents. No matter what age or what stage of life you are in. I am talking directly to you. The word here that he used for "Children." This is not an age specific term. He is not talking about kids who are like 6, or 8 or 9, or 10 or 12, or whatever. It is not limited to any specific age group.
2. The word "children" refers to "any child of any parent who still lives in the home and is under the guidance and the authority and the provision of that parent."
3. So let me just make two observations before we get started. I am talking today to what the Bible calls, "Children." Not adults. I am talking about children and to kids who still live at home. When a child marries and a child leaves home. Or a child gets a college degree and they go out and get their own way. And they get their own job. And they are living in their own place. They are no longer bound to obey your parents.

4. So what I am going to do is this. I am going to ask every young person here today. You may be 16, 17, 18 years old. But you are living at home. Your parents still provide for your needs. Your basic needs. And you are living under their roof and you are living under their authority. I am going to ask you today to get under the authority of your parents.

5. You will not only be literally training yourself to be a better parent one day to your children. You will then be putting yourself in a position where God can honor you and God can bless you. If you are going to live at home with a rebellious spirit toward your parents, God will not honor you and God will not bless you.

I. Children Must Listen To Their Parents.

The Bible says, “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things.”

1. Now, that word “obey” is a fascinating word in the Greek language. It is actually a combination of two words. One word is the word “listen.” And one word is the word “under.” It means to “listen under.”

“Children listen under your parents.”

1. Or, what he is really saying is, the first step in honoring your parents is this. “I want you to listen to what they have to say.” “Listen under your parents.” You cannot obey somebody that you do not listen to. God wants you to listen to your parents.

2. Good parents will never deliberately steer you in the wrong direction. Now I realize that not all parents are good parents. And I realize that there are parents that don’t stir their kids in the right direction.

3. Now, that is not the kind of parent that I am talking about. I’m talking about a good parent that gives you good advice and will steer you in the right direction. They are the ones that love you. They are the ones that live with you. They are the ones that have your best interest at heart. Doesn’t it make sense to seek out their advice and to listen to what they have to say?

4. A wise man named Solomon gave this advice to his own son.

Proverbs 1:8= “My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.”

1. Your ears are extremely powerful weapons. Because what goes into your ear, goes into your mind. What goes into your mind, controls your thoughts. What controls your thoughts, controls your actions. And what controls your actions controls your destiny.

2. So you know why it pays to listen to your parents? Because if you listen to your parents. They will save you a lot of sin. They will save you from a lot of suffering. They will save you from a lot of sorrow that you will never, ever have to experience. If you will hear their voice, you will know their counsel. And if you follow it, it will spare you from a lot of heartache.

3. Let me just say to the parents. Your children will be a whole lot more prone to listening to you if you will listen to them. You have to continue to have that spirit where you say, "I am interested in what you have to say." But kids, you are to listen to your parents. And then if you listen to your parents. That also means that God wants us to...

II. Children Are To Obey Their Parents.

"Children, be obedient to your parents in all things."

1. Life is an obedience school. I mean, from the time you and I were born, the very first lesson God wanted to teach all of us is how to obey. How to get under God-given authority. Everyone of us in this room was born with a tendency. Not to obey, but a tendency to disobey.

Psalm 58:3 "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies."

1. Compared to God, we are all wicked. If God is absolutely perfect, then you have to admit, "Yeah, we all fall short of the glory of God." If you have children, you know this. You never have to sit your children down and say, "Now listen, I am going to teach you how to disobey me. Let me teach you how to fight with your sister. Let me teach you how to pull her hair." You don't have to teach that. We are all born that way. We are not born with a tendency to obey. We are born with a tendency to disobey.

And so, just to make this as strong as he could, look at what Paul says in verse 20="Children, be obedient to your parents in all things."

1. Now, you know what the word "all" means? It means ALL. That means, you don't obey your parents just when you think they are right. You don't obey your parents just when you feel like they are taking the right course of action. You don't obey your parents just when it fits in to what you want to do.

2. Paul says, "Unless your parents ask you to do something that is unbiblical, or unethical, or ungodly, or immoral." Paul says, "you are to obey your parents."

Ephesians 6:1 puts a different twist on all of this. He says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

1. You know why you ought to obey your parents? It is the right thing to do. So that means, even if your parents are not Christian parents, you ought to obey your parents.

And that means that even if you are not a Christian young person, you ought to obey your parents. What is right is right.

2. Everybody in life learns, either the hard way or the easy way. There is a difference between right and wrong. And you are to do what is right and not what is wrong. And if you do what is wrong instead of what is right, you are going to suffer the consequences. In the short run, you obey your parents it is going to pay off big time for your parents. But in the long run, it is going to pay off for you.

3. One of the most important reasons why you ought to learn to obey your parents is this. One of these days, you are going to be a parent. One of these days you are going to want your kids to obey you just like your parents want you to obey them. And one of these days you are going to be teaching your kids some of the exact same lessons that your parents taught you.

4. The best teachers are generally the best learners. You show me someone who is really good at learning something. Most of the time, they are really good at teaching something. And they practice the lessons of obedience. That is why God wants us to listen to our parents. And that is why God wants us to obey our parents. But then, #3

III. Children Are To Honor Their Parents.

Now listen to this last part of verse 20= “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”

1. Do you know why your obedience pleases God? Because it keeps one of the 10 commandments. We all know the 5th commandment.

Exodus 20:12= “Honor your father and your mother that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives to you.”

1. When I obey my parents, I honor my parents and I please God. Obedience honors your parents and it pleases God. I am obeying my parents. I am giving them the honor that God wants me to give them.

That is why the Bible says, “You are to obey your parents in all things.”

1. What if Jesus had chosen to obey his father in everything except one thing. Because if you remember, when he was about to go to the cross, Jesus made this statement to his heavenly father.

He said, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”

1. Do you know what Jesus was really saying? “I don’t want to do this. I don’t really feel like doing this. I would really rather not do this. You know what? I have obeyed you 100% of the way, 100% of the time. I am not doing this one.”

2. We wouldn't be here this morning. We would have no hope of going to heaven. The only reason that you and I have a chance at going to heaven is because God's son obeyed his father in all things. And that is exactly what Paul says we are to do.

He says, "Obey your parents in all things."

1. It is not just enough to obey them. You have got to honor them. "What is the difference in obeying my parents and honoring them?" Obedience is outward. Honor is inward.

2. Obedience is an action. Honor is an attitude. Your parents can make you obey them. But you can even obey your parents in such a way that God says, "That is not honoring your parents." There is going to come that wonderful day where you are no longer required to obey your parents. But there will never come a time where God does not require you to honor your parents.

God's Glory in the Home Sermon Series
"The Role of Parents for the Glory of God"
Colossians 3:21

Introduction:

1. If you are a parent, your children are not going to always meet your expectations. If you are a young person, your parents are not always going to meet your expectations. Parents are to encourage their children to find God's will for their lives and to fulfill that will for his glory.
2. Now, that is all God wants you to do as a parent. God is not expecting you to raise perfect kids. Your kids may not make straight A's. Your kids may not go to medical school. Your kids may not go into the ministry. Your kids may not be elected president of their class. They may not be the most popular kid in school.
3. God says, "You just encourage your children to find my will for their lives and to fulfill that will for my glory." Every parent is going to be primarily a positive influence on their kids or a negative influence on their kids.
4. When your kids are grown and gone, they are going to say one of two things about you. They will either basically say, "My dad and my mom were positive influences on me." Or they are going to say, "They were negative influences on me."
5. In Colossians 3, Paul is talking to wives and to husbands and to children and today he is talking to parents. And he says something in kind of an unusual way.

Colossians 3:21= "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart."

1. Now, let me say a word about the word you can draw a line through the word "fathers" in your bibles if you want and write "parents." Because that is what the word means.

So, what you really have in verse 21 is, "Parents, do not exasperate your children."

1. Now, that is kind of odd to me. You would have expected Paul, when he said something to parents. To say something like this, "Now parents, you make sure you discipline your kids. You make sure you keep your kids straight. And you make sure you raise you kids right." He didn't say that. He came at it from the other end. He said, "Parents, you better make sure that you don't exasperate your children, so they will not lose heart."
2. In other words, Paul said, "Look, don't be a negative influence on their lives. Be a positive influence on their lives." I want to share with you how to do that. 3 easy things

that every parent, if you will give your child, you will fulfill God's expectation for you and God will honor you as a parent.

I. Parents Are To Love Their Children.

1. Now, Paul said we have to be careful how we raise our children. And how we relate to our children. For this reason.

Look what he says in the last part of verse 21= "so that they will not lose heart."

1. Why did Paul say that? So easy for kids to lose heart. It is so easy for kids to get discouraged. From the time a child is born, a child desires and craves two things from his parents. More than anything else. He wants love and he wants acceptance.

2. If you have kids, you didn't choose your kids God chose your kids for you. Jessica and I wanted to have kids. We didn't get to choose to have a specific gender. But God chose your kids. Jessica and I don't ever want Madelyn or Noah to think that we love them because of their performance. Or because of what they do. Or where they go. Or how much money they make. All of that is irrelevant.

3. What you want to convey to your children is this. "I don't love you because of what you do. I love you because of who you are. You are my son. You are my daughter. That is all I need to know. That is all you need to know. I love you and I accept you." We are to love our children the same way that God loves us.

And the Bible says, "God's love for us is the same love that a father has for a child."

1 John 3:1= "Behold, what manner of love the father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God."

1. There are two ways you better express your love to your child. #1 you say it. #2 you show it. You say it and you show it. There is no substitute for that touch. One of the best ways you can show your kids you love them is when they want to talk to you, listen to them. Give them your undivided, unreserved attention. And please listen to them. And when they have something going on in their life, you need to be there. Whether it is a ball game or a recital or a school function, you need to be there.

2. Our problem is that we are living in a day and age where parents give their kids things but they don't give them love. Oh, we give them clothes and we give them cars and we give them cash. But what about the attention? What about the affection? And what about the affirmation?

II. Parents Are To Discipline Their Children.

1. If you give your children love, you give your children discipline. See, there is a flip side to this thing of parenting. One side is called love. But the other side is called

discipline. I realize that there is not a more distasteful thing for a parent to have to deal with than to discipline kids. No parent that is a good parent and a normal parent gets joy out of having to discipline their children.

2. But the Bible makes it very plain. God gives every parent a job. Your job is to set limits for your children. And your job is to correct those children when they deliberately disobey those limits.

Hebrews 12:6= “For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.”

1. It is proof of a parents love when they discipline their children. Listen to this.

Proverbs 13:24= “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”

1. Worse than that, you are contributing to their self-destruction.

Proverbs 19:18= “Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.”

1. Now, I want you to hear what I am about to say. I am not talking about abuse. I’m not even talking about punishment. You will never find in the Bible where God tells a parent to punish a child. Because that is not our job. Our job is to discipline our child. The difference between punishment and discipline is this. Punishment is intended just to inflict penalty. Discipline is intended to promote growth. You punish criminals. You discipline children.

2. And whenever you have to discipline a child, it is not just to make him pay for what he has done. It is to get him to understand why he did what he did. Why it was wrong. And to try and ensure that he will not do it again.

3. There are two ways that you can embitter your children and two ways that you can cause them to lose heart. You can give them so much freedom and so few limits that they get the idea that you don’t even care about them at all. Or you can be so strict and give them no freedom that they never ever develop and become their own person. And there needs to be balance.

4. Now, how can you exasperate or irritate your children? Here is a list of ways. If you really want to irritate your children, do these things.

A. Overprotection.

B. Favoritism.

C. Depreciating His Worth.

- D. Discouragement.
- E. No Affection Demonstrated.
- F. Not Providing His Needs.
- G. Lack of Standards.
- H. Criticism.
- I. Neglect.
- J. Over-Discipline.

1. Give them love. Give them discipline. #3

III. Parents Are To Lead Their Children.

1. Parents, that is where so many of us drop the ball. Because even though we try, sometimes we lead them in a way that doesn't encourage them. It discourages them.

Paul said this to parents in Ephesians 6:4= "and you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

1. Paul said, "Dads, moms, you are a teacher. You are a teacher in your home. Your home is a university. And you are the professor." You have got to exercise leadership 24/7. you are always teaching. the way you teach your kids is just as important as where you lead your kids.

Proverbs 16:21= "The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning."

1. You can teach your kids one of two ways. Being negative all the time. Fussing all the time. On their case all the time. Nagging all the time. Always looking for the bad. Always looking to catch them doing something wrong. Or, you can teach them in a positive way. Look for the good and not for the bad. Look for the right and not for the wrong. Look for ways you can build them up instead of ways that you can tear them down.

2. In every situation that you face with your kids. And you are going to have thousands of them before they get out of the house. Here is the key question I want you to ask yourself, "What is the spiritually encouraging thing to do?"

3. Practical things to do.

- A. Spend at least 2 hours, uninterrupted, with each one of your children doing something they enjoy doing.

B. Surprise your child with a trip to a movie or a park.

C. Have a family night once a week where every child gets to choose the activity for the evening for your family.

D. Lay your hand on each child and bless them, pray for them, and tell them you love them unconditionally. And that you are proud of them, simply for who they are.

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING FAMILY MEMBERS TO FULFILL THEIR BIBLICAL ROLES TO THE GLORY OF GOD AT WALNUT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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This project sought to equip family members to fulfill their biblical roles as a reflection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Walnut Street Baptist Church and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis on Colossians 3:18-21 to show each family members God-given role and responsibility within the family. Chapter 3 examines the pressing cultural issues impacting the traditional biblical family. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific preaching curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals. Most importantly, this project seeks to equip each member of the family to fulfill their biblical roles as a reflection of the Gospel and for the glory of God.

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