

Gospel-Centered Family Life Colossians 3

Intro – This morning I can't resist telling about one of the funniest book titles I've ever heard. Here it comes, are you ready? The book is by conservative thinker David Brooks and the book actually has a serious theme but the title is "Bobos in Paradise". Here's the idea behind the title: "Bobos stands for the combination of "bohemian" and "bourgeois". His basic observation is that a new phenomenon in America is the emergence of who combine "bohemian" or basically hippy morality with "bourgeois" or middle class materialism. As you can imagine he's got some concerns with this new phenomenon, but he realizes he himself is a part of this phenomenon and that there may even be ways to take this new turn their (or our) specific concerns and material success into avenues of blessing for the world. But enough of David Brooks ideas... I'm just wandering as we are starting a series on the family if maybe his book title doesn't apply to our home life...

Are we "Bobos in Paradise"? Sometimes it seems like our weddings give us the idea that marriage and home life are supposed to be paradise. In fact, God designed marriage and family to be a wonderful place of comfort and peace and retreat from the aches and pains of the world around us, but pretty soon we realize that we are really just a couple of broken people bonking into each other in this thing we call home. And then we add children to the mix and the home becomes a circus and if we aren't careful it becomes a battleground. Yes, sometimes I think that we are "Bobos in Paradise" when it comes to our homes. And that's one reason that it's time for us to take some extended time talking about family issues on Sunday mornings...

- Some reasons for this series...
 - *The tendency to either neglect our family responsibilities or to idolize the family...*
 - *Families are so broken in our world... families that are healthy (not perfect, but healthy), forgiving, and work through problems well are a GREAT testimony of the grace of God.*
 - *The Bible gives some specific instructions on family. And since the Bible speaks on this, we should listen.*
 - *Home is where not living according to the Biblical Gospel is most quickly revealed and where the consequences hurt the most. In other words, there are a lot of wounds in our family relationships that need the healing of the Gospel.*
- Now... another thought...
 - *I have tended to not preach a lot of sermons directly related to family...*
 - *But... most of my sermons have ways of connecting and applying to family and marriage.*
 - *And... these sermons should have ways of connecting and applying not just to family and marriage but to every area of life.*
 - *So, if you are thinking, my children are grown and our marriage won't change at this point, or I'm divorced, single, or widowed, wait just a minute. As long as you are still breathing, you have relationships with people and there will always be application from these messages that can just be applied to those relationships. AND... on top of that **Psalm 68.6** says - God setteth the solitary in families... You have extended family that you can be praying for; you have relationships that need the truth of the Gospel; and you have needs that only the Gospel can meet.*

- And then finally, as a part of introducing this series I want to make some comments on the Bible's teaching on the family. In one sense the Bible has a lot to say about family issues. And then in another sense it doesn't.
 - Let me start with what it doesn't say. If you scan the New Testament there isn't a book or letter dedicated to the issue of family. In fact, there isn't even one entire chapter fully devoted to family matters. So to some degree, when we see how many seminars and books and recordings and web-sites are dedicated to marriage and family issues, you have to wonder how much of what is being said and written is what the Bible says.
 - What you do find in the New Testament is the introduction of a new perspective on life. So for example children are to obey their parents "in the Lord", wives are to submit to their husbands as is fitting "in the Lord", and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. This new perspective places all family relationships under the lordship of Christ! We'll see that again and again in this series.
 - At the same time, the Bible has a lot to say about marriage and family, especially in the Old Testament. For example the book of Proverbs is the instruction of a father to a son. There is one whole book of the Bible about sex, the Song of Solomon. The 10 Commandments calls for children to honor their parents and protects the sanctity of marriage by prohibiting adultery. Other passages in the law direct various aspects of family life. And a handful of Psalms speak about the generational blessing of the godly home. And then there are some passages that call for family commitment or challenge our hearts at a basic and deep level like Joshua's "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" and the promise in Malachi that God will send a prophet before the day of the Lord to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.
 - And then one final observation regarding the Biblical teaching on the family. Jesus expected his followers to have a greater loyalty to Him than to their families. He surely shocked his hearers when He said "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Jesus words point out the power of family loyalty and in a sense the rightness of family of love, and at the same time calls for a higher loyalty, an ultimate loyalty to Jesus Himself.
- Now... I want to try to give you an idea of how I think that we should approach sort of "the raw data" of what the Bible does and does not say regarding the family... These are kind of the foundational principles of interpretation that will govern this whole series...
- **We all live in broken homes because of sin. Family life as it was intended to be experiences as beings made in the image of God ended that day in the Garden of Eden when sin entered human existence. But because of the cross of Christ, much in our lives and homes can be healed and restored. That restoration comes as we apply the gospel to every area of life and relationship. But full and final wholeness in our hearts and relationships awaits the glory of eternity.**
- Let me put it another way. The Scriptures include the high calling of godly family living. But we are unable to fulfill that high calling in our own strength. You might come to me and say my wife and I are in constant conflict, and if all I do is say "choose you this day whom you will serve" you are going to come back to me the following week and say that you decided that you would follow the Lord, but you are still fighting. But if we can apply the power of the Gospel to your need, then we will begin to get somewhere.
- Well, this has already been a long enough introduction, now the best way to see this is to actually see it worked out in a passage of Scripture, so please turn your attention to Colossians 3. As we read this, I want us to notice several things about the "structure" of this passage...

- First of all, we are headed to chapter 3 verse 18 – chapter 4 verse 1 which students of the Bible have generally called a “household table” or household rules. We coming to that.
- But before we get there, we are going to read slowly through chapter 3 verse 1-17 and imagine how all of the commands given in those verses could apply to family situations.
- And then finally, as we are reading I want us to notice the motivations that are given for following those commands.
- So let’s take off... Notice commands and how they might apply to family life, then notice the motivations that are to be behind obedience to those commands. If we will notice these things, we should be seeing that this is not legalistic rules but the medicine of the Gospel applied to real life.

Colossians 3:1-4:1

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

- There are 2 commands in this section...
 - *Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God...*
 - *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things of the earth.*
- What would your family be like if husbands set their minds on things above? Wives? Children? Grandchildren? Our hearts would be seeking eternal treasure and pleasure both for ourselves and for our loved ones. We would keep material wealth or the lack of it in perspective. (Wait a minute, did you hear that? That should translate into “all arguments about money are a thing of the past!”) That would be when memorizing Scripture is more important than getting the next I-Phone! That would be when praying together is more important than earning the next promotion.
- That kind of thinking would revolutionize our homes!
- But we also need to see the theological motivation behind this command: *For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* Basically what Paul is doing is taking the reality that he is constantly teaching to his churches that when we are united to Jesus by faith, His death represents our death and His resurrection represents our resurrection. In other words, when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, not only are our sins forgiven, we are united to His death and resurrection in such a way that we are dead to this world. We no longer have to yield to the seduction of power, money, sex, and popularity. We can live above the pleasures of the world and experience the pleasure of a relationship with God! Our life is hidden with Christ in God. In other words, our life isn’t our own anymore. It is as if WE are hidden in HIM. We no longer exist for ourselves, we exist for Him. Therefore, SEEK THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE because if you are a Christian everything else is tasteless wonder bread compared to the filet mignon of spiritual treasure and pleasure!
- next...

⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the

image of its creator. ¹¹Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

- This paragraph has basically 3 commands, all prohibitions. Imagine families without sexual immorality, greed, anger, bitterness, or sins of our words like gossip, slander, obscenity, or deceit.
- If we are all honest, we recognize that we don't have to look very far to find these sins affecting our homes and our hearts. Evil desire and passion for example are listed. They are sins of sexual lust. Whose home or extended family hasn't been touched by the scourge of pornography?
- What would family life be like without any dishonesty spouses or parents and children?
- How would we live if anger didn't raise its ugly head to cloud our vision?
- But again, we need to see the motivation that God points to behind these commands of prohibition.
Verses 9 & 10 – Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
 - Paul the Apostle is just working out from the reality that Christians have had a radical identity change and nature change. We have “put off” the old self. Again, our lives are not our own and we no longer have to be controlled by all the forces of sin that once controlled us. That's why he brings in the ideas of **verse 7** - *⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.* That old way of living is an old way of life. You have a new identity and a renewed nature.
 - That's what he's getting at in verse 10 – you *have put on the new self, which is being renewed!* Prior to salvation from sin, we were like rotting corpses. After salvation the original image of God is being renewed in us. God is changing us to be holy and loving and compassionate and just and wise like He is holy and loving and compassionate and just and wise.
 - THAT IS THE MOTIVATION TO PUT SINFUL IMPULSES TO DEATH. (By the way, the imagery of putting something to death is used here to highlight the powerful struggle that we face to deal with the vestiges of the old nature within us.)
- Next Paul goes from putting off the old ways and putting to death sinful impulses to commands to put on aspects of godly character...

¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- This section has many, many imperatives.
- What if compassion and kindness characterized our homes?
- What if humility, meekness and patience were consistently expressed in our homes?
- What if when there were offenses we bore with one another and forgave one another?
- What if LOVE was above all other characteristics in our families?
- What if we expressed gratitude consistently?
- What if the word of Christ was dwelling in our homes?
- What if our homes were places where wisdom was taught and people were encouraged in godly living?
- And what if our families were circles of praise to God.

- What if EVERYTHING that we did was done in the name of Jesus!
- **Now here are some things that I want us to notice from this...**
- **First** of all, this time Paul does not list a doctrinal motivation for obeying these commands. There is no “for you have died with Christ and your life is hid with Christ in God”. There is no “seeing that you have put off the old self and have put on the new self”. But these doctrinal motivations from the first two sections basically apply here. We should do these things because this is what characterizes a person who has died to the old way of living and in Jesus has come alive to the way the God truly designed us to live.
- **Second**, this little section demonstrates that absolutely everything in life can be done in praise to God and in the name of Jesus. We can forgive one another in the name of Jesus. But we can also SERVE one another by taking out the trash or mopping the floor or dusting the shelves in the name of Jesus! EVERYTHING that is a part of life can be done in Jesus’ name. And that means that everything in our relationships with one another from love to forgiveness to patience with each other’s hang-ups can be done for the glory of God.
- **Third**, we should notice the priority and the power of love. Really all of these things could be seen as expressions of love. patience, forgiveness, kindness, all of these are simply practical expressions of love. God says that above all we should put on love. And that love binds everything together, which probably means not so much that love binds together all of these previous characteristics but that love binds our relationships together in perfect harmony.
- **Fourth**, originally I said that there was no doctrinal motivation listed for putting on these characteristics, but in a way there is. It is not listed in the normal position and in the same way as the other paragraphs in this chapter, but it is listed in the middle... *if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. AS THE LORD HAS FORGIVEN YOU.* That is the motivation for putting on all these characteristics.
- **Finally**, we should notice that our relationships, especially our family relationships are not going to be perfect, there are going to be things that we will have to choose whether to complain about or forgive, but our families should be places where we experience the blessings of a renewed spirit. We should experience the fruit of our salvation at home. That means humility and kindness and patience and love can be a reality in our marriages and in our relationships with our parents and children and grandchildren. This can be a reality not because we are so good but because God’s grace is so powerful!

NOW... finally we get to what Paul says about family life. And he has comparatively little to say! **3.22 – 4.1** are really about slaves and masters which were considered a part of the ancient household but have more application to employers and employees today. So really all that Paul has to say in this section to family relationships is wrapped up in only 4 verses. And that is the point that I’m trying to make. Yes, we need this specific teaching on submission and love and children obey your parents, but all of the godly character that has been expounded for the 17 previous verses is being assumed in this teaching on the family. Another way of saying it is that godly character of the heart makes all the difference in the world when it comes to our family relationships. You can’t have the submission without the putting off of the old self and putting on the new. Husbands you can’t lead without the humility and love that is talked about in the previous paragraph. Fathers, it is impossible to not discourage our children without the patience and kindness and love that we just talked about.

So let’s go ahead and read these roles and responsibilities of family relationships. And to complete out the paragraph we are going to go ahead and read what was written to slaves and masters...

¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²²Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

^{4:1}Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

- At some point in this series, we are going to come back and deal with the specific roles and responsibilities of each member of the family. But for now I want to just notice together how often the ideas of this paragraph are connected to the Lordship of Christ.
- Did you notice that?
 - Wives are to submit to their husbands *as is fitting in the Lord*.
 - Children are to obey their parents because it *pleases the Lord*.
 - Slaves (or we might apply this to employees) are to obey their masters(or employers), *fearing the Lord*.
 - Slaves / employees are to work diligently and “heartily” *as for the Lord*.
 - Slaves / employees are to realize that in their work they are *serving the Lord Christ*.
 - And masters / employers are to recognize that they *also have a Master in heaven*.
- Here’s what’s going on... Paul is teaching that because of our great salvation, because of our being dead with Christ in His death on the cross, and because of our being raised with Christ in His resurrection, and because we are being renewed in the image of our Creator that the Lordship of Christ is invading our homes and our work places. The places that we spend 90% of our time need to be governed by our relationship to the Lord. Wives and husbands, and parents and children, and grandparents and grandchildren are now “in the Lord” if they are saved by the grace of God! And that needs to be the governing factor in all of those relationships!
- Wives, you need to submit to your husband because “in the Lord” he is your provider and protector.
- Husbands you need to love with tenderness and love because your wife is “in the Lord”.
- Children you need to obey your parents because it pleases the Lord. And “in the Lord” they are your God-given protectors and guides.
- Parents, we are to not frustrate our children because they are God’s creation and “in the Lord” we don’t want to discourage the part of God’s creation that has been entrusted to us.

Conclusion –

As I mentioned, as this series unfolds we will get into more detail regarding what the Bible says about all of the roles and responsibilities of each family member. But for now, what I think we need is to acknowledge how much we need an invasion of the Lordship of Christ into our family relationships.

- Are our homes characterized by love or are they battlegrounds?
- Is your home characterized by purity and honesty or is there immorality and deceit?
- Is your home governed by seeking what is above or are all your energies put into acquiring more stuff here below?
- For those who are married are we bound together in love or are we drifting apart because of accumulated unforgiveness?

On and on we could go, but what I think is that we need an invasion in our families, an invasion of Jesus... What about you? Let’s pray...