

**Colossians**  
**Week 7**  
**Col 3:18 - 21**

Good to see you. We're in a series studying Colossians... so, grab a Bible and let's get to Genesis 1...

We'll also be in **Colossians 3:18-21**. Go ahead and get there. Then once you do, set your thumb there and flip back to Genesis 1 because we got some context to cover before I get into it. You'll see why soon enough.

**Genesis 1:26-28**

**26** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

**27** So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

**28** And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Page one of the Bible - God has this vision for the world to be filled with His presence and His goodness and love. And He does it through creating human beings - specifically, he does it through creating a family. Adam and Eve. Male and female. Now a few things to note both in this text and in the subsequent chapters:

- **Equal and distinct (v.27)** - both made in God's image. Both with equal value and worth.
  - And the male is called to work and keep the Garden.
    - In Genesis 2, it says the man is to work "evehd" and keep "shamar" the Garden. The next time you see those verbs paired together in the Old Testament, it's used to describe the priests in Israel - and priests were men who were singled out by God and were given the charge to stand before God on behalf of the people and take responsibility for the nation of Israel and their jobs were to teach and lead others so that the nation of Israel would pursue God's will and mission in this world.
      - So, in a similar way, when it says the husband is to "work" and "keep" the Garden it's calling to mind that just like the priests, so the husband was singled out by God to stand before God to lead and teach his family and ultimately take responsibility.
  - The woman is called an ezer - a source of refuge and strength.
    - The word "ezer" is used elsewhere in the OT to mean salvation, a source of rescue for others - it's this idea that without an ezer you are powerless. So in a similar way, the wife is to be a source of power and strength for her family.
  - In Genesis 2, you also see the woman made from Adam's rib - that word rib is the Hebrew - tselah - and the next time that word is used in Exodus to describe the ark inside the temple - like a support beam in a building that as soon as you remove it - it all comes crashing down.
    - So when you combine those two concepts - ezer and tselah - you see this beautiful picture of how the wife is this source of support and strength and rescue - that without her the whole thing comes crashing down.
  - In Genesis 2, it says the man and the woman - equal and distinct - made in God's image - become one flesh - that both of them leaning into their God-given roles are now one unit. Complementing each other. One team moving forward to fully accomplish what God has for them and for the world.
    - And looking at v.28 you see what their mission is in the world:

- **Fill and multiply the earth (v.28)** - start a family. Have kids who will have kids who will have kids so that the planet would be filled with people who love God and want His Kingdom to cover the planet.
  - It's this idea that the husband and wife, they're on the same team. And they're to have kids who will be on the same team - everyone going after this vision together - to bring the Garden into the world.

And while this was the goal for the family unit - sin quickly makes it all go wrong, and everyone's to blame. In **Genesis 3**, Eve eats from the fruit, using her power and strength to serve herself, but who does God call out first? Adam. God holds the husband responsible. The husband was not doing what God intended for him to do, refusing to lead and teach his family.

And from Genesis 3 onwards, marriage and the family unit at large go off the rails. God had this beautiful design in place, and all throughout the Old Testament, we often times see pictures of broken families and broken marriages that are nowhere near what God envisioned for them in the first place. **So there is family breakdown everywhere you go now.**

- In fact, you see these families and marriages looking more like the world around them than they do this vision in Genesis 1. Men and women perpetuating what went wrong in the Garden:
  - Husbands treating wives terribly and wives treating husbands terribly and perpetuating into the next generations
    - The OT doesn't shy away from the details and it doesn't condone these actions but in part to showcase just how badly things have gone from this Genesis 1 ideal of marriage and family.
    - It's not just that sin has affected individuals but has impacted whole societies at large

**And the beauty of what Jesus does through His death and resurrection is that He is in the process of remaking all of us, in every category and sphere of life, and that includes our homes.**

So when you have the apostle Paul writing to this community in the Roman Empire, there is a family breakdown here as well. Just to give you a snapshot: In the Roman world, wives, children, and servants were in some ways all lumped together as property to the husband. **The primary value or idea at that time was one of power.**

- The husband was essentially the king of his own little empire.
  - Women had no real voice in the home. Women were subjugated to the will of the husband - and if they didn't follow suit - they could risk the husband abandoning and divorcing them. Which, women at that time, did not have many ways to pursue income and stability outside of being married. So wives lived under the fear of following their husbands with whatever they said lest they get thrown out into the street. They had little to no voice in politics, decision-making, or getting an education.<sup>1</sup>
  - Children were also said to be less than. It was believed that they didn't have a soul until they were 1 or 2. They were the primary responsibility of the mom. I read somewhere that because "power" was the main idea at that time, parents had to toughen them up, often subjugating children to ice cold baths while their toddlers and regularly flogging them so that they would get in line.<sup>2</sup>

**So you don't have to imagine too hard how this wasn't going well in the home if you lived in the Empire, not just for kids and wives, but for husbands too. It's easy to imagine a man with unlimited power in the house, where that would go wrong.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://sbrooklogue.com/2022/03/29/the-origins-of-ancient-rome-reveal-incredibly-sexist-social-structures/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://factsanddetails.com/world/cat56/sub369/entry-6298.html>

**My point is, at the time of the Colossian church, the family picture is a far far cry from what was intended in Genesis 1.**

Now all of that background in mind, Paul's going to offer this corrective as a way to subvert family expectations. And he's going to come after them and step on some toes.

**Colossians 3:18-21**

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. **20** Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Now hear me real quick - two things

**1** - let me tell you what Paul is not saying here - because I think it's pretty critical to understanding this passage:

- Paul's not saying, "When it comes to your marriages and your family, do what the rest of the world does" Paul's not this patriarchal sexist that's stuck in the past giving antiquated advice, and we would do well to just move past what he says. That's what many would say he's doing.
- And I just want to clear the air and say if that was what he was actually saying, that would be a big pivot from what he's been doing this entire letter.
  - Because, in everything so far in Colossians, he's been arguing for how you look different from the world. This is how you look distinct from the Empire. That's bad logic.
    - And all throughout Paul's saying things that are going up against how people would have lived and thought at the time...and this passage is no different
  - What you actually see is Paul is coming after the status-quo of the Roman family and calling some people out saying, "Look, if you're in Jesus that's not how you act anymore." I could only imagine the pastor of that church reading that letter out to the church in Colossae and as soon as he reads this section, peoples eyes are trying not to look over at some other people in the church, like, "psst...he's talking about you."

**2** - Notice who's talking to these married people about how they should operate in the home: Paul a single guy, not married. No kids. Instructing moms and dads how to live. I don't want us to miss that because it's beautiful. Paul, who is not in the same season of life, is able to lovingly challenge and instruct people in a different season of life than him. This says something pretty wonderful about how we think about singles and married couples in the church. It's not like we silo each other off - marrieds in one camp and singles in another camp and we can't ever speak into each others lives and help each other follow Jesus better. Rather its singles and marrieds, doing life together, speaking into each other, because we're all in this together.

- Singles, you have a role to play in the lives of the married couples in our church
- Married couples, you have a role to play in the lives of singles
  - And if you need any more proof of that, look at Jesus who was single and still had quite a lot to say about the importance of marriage.

So let's take a minute to unpack what's being said here. Look again at **Colossians 3:18-19**:

**Colossians 3:18-19**

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Paul is essentially instilling this family ethic that points back to Genesis 1 - that everyone is on the same team. Husbands, wives, and kids are all of equal value and all pulling in the direction to bring Heaven and Earth together.

So husbands, love your wives. Lead your wives. Ephesians 5 elaborates on this and says - as Jesus loved the church and died for her - so you should love your wives and die to yourself. Step into what God has called you into and fix what Adam did wrong in the Garden. Take responsibility for your family

Wives in the same way, Paul is calling them back to a Genesis 1 ethic. You have this strength and this power within you - as an ezer - to submit to your husband so that you can go in the same direction.

And as I say that I realize that word “submit” comes with some cultural baggage, but in the Bible submission doesn’t imply weakness or blindly agreeing with whatever the other says, rather, submission means putting your strength under the right conditions. It’s using what you’ve been given as an ezer to strengthen the calling and direction of your family and relationship.

In the same way, the New Testament says God the Son submits to God the Father. And God the Spirit submits to God the Son. All with their roles to play, yet never once implying that anyone in the Godhead is inferior or less than the other - because the moment you think submission in the Godhead means “less than,” then you’re denying the bedrock of Christianity.

So if we wouldn’t say “submission” means inferiority with God, why would we make that argument with husbands and wives?

So Paul’s making a clear connection between submission is not defined according to how culture views it, its defined by the work of Jesus. **Colossians 3:18** says it too, “as is fitting to the Lord.” Submission is in some way a small picture of Jesus’ love towards us.

Side note: Women are not to submit to all men, the wife submits to her husband, who in turn, the husband submits himself to Jesus. Choosing to work together as a team.

So when Paul points it back to Jesus and the Genesis 1 ideal, he’s turning the whole concept of roles in the home on its head. Wives in the Christian home are now elevated as equals to their husbands. Their voice and their power are restored. Mom and Dad are parenting together, and at the same time, they are distinct in their roles. Husbands submit to God as they lead out in the home, and as a result, the wife submits to God and submits husband, using all of her God-given strength and power to channel that to be a blessing to others

The best illustration I can think of - and yes all illustrations break down at some point - is one of a sports team. You’ve got the team captain out on the field, getting their instructions from the head coach, to lead their team together. The team captain is not necessarily the most skilled, most able-bodied, most competent, or even most athletic person on the field. They are simply the point person that the head coach has put in charge to help lead the team. That’s what a husband is to his family. He’s not calling the shots on his own, he’s getting his orders from Jesus. He’s pow-wowing with the rest of the team to get them on the same page. And he’s doing the best he can to lead his team. The team needs the captain and the captain needs a team.

This is important. The husband is not the head coach who tells everyone else what to do. He is the team captain who helps the whole team implement what the head coach says needs to happen. He is to help set the culture and tone of the whole team and make sure the head coaches instructions are being carried out. Jesus is the head coach. He calls the shots and gives the instructions. And it could be - like it is in my house - that your wife is the star player on the team. It’s like - she’s out there getting all the goals, and dunks on the team. And my job as the captain is to help get my coach’s orders and set everyone up for success.

And when that happens, we are stepping into our God-given roles to help bring Heaven down to Earth in our homes. Pulling in the same direction together. Paul then pivots into parenting:

**Colossians 3:20-21**

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Once again, this is Paul elevating children in the Roman Empire. Kids are image bearers called to obey mom and dad as they're helping lead their family and go in the same direction, bringing the Garden of Eden into the home. So Mom and Dad, don't be harsh with them, also don't be passive with them - but call them to obey you as you obey Jesus. Call them to honor you as the authority in the home who wants what's best for them: to help them grow into mature adults who Lord-willing will one day love Jesus.

That's the vision that Paul is calling them into - getting Genesis 1-Garden ethic into the home.

**Many people, I would stand to guess, do not like a verse like this. It was confrontational then, and its confrontational to us now, though in different ways. Every society since the Garden has had family breakdowns in different ways, and this was how it looked for the Colossians. It looks different for us.**

The breakdown for them was the man being a tyrant in the home, and it led to the disintegration of the family. **Power was ultimate.**

And I would argue, in America in 2023, we live in one of the most individualistic, autonomous societies in all of human history. And it's led to the disintegration of families. **Individual freedom is ultimate.**

- If freedom and autonomy are the ultimate values, then marriage, generally speaking, exists for my happiness and enjoyment, and the moment my needs aren't fulfilled, the moment the marriage gets tough, the moment it becomes what I haven't signed up for then, I'm out because it's about me. And where does that lead? Family disintegration and breakdown.
  - Charlotte last week and saw a billboard on the highway that read, "Life's too short. Get a divorce."
  - In an age where autonomy is the utmost value - it's no wonder the divorce rate in America is about 50% -the third highest in the world.<sup>3</sup> I was driving home from
  - According to the most recent US Census, 18.5 million children growing up w/o their fathers – #1 world
- And this applies in similar ways to how we view parenting. My role as a parent is to make sure that my child grows up to express themselves as an individual so that they pursue maximum happiness and autonomy. So whatever the community says, whatever mom and dad say, that's ultimately irrelevant. It's ultimately on the child to figure it out.
  - In an age where our job is to ensure our kids are as autonomous as possible, I read somewhere that between 93 and 95 percent of all the time you will spend in-person with your children will happen before they turn 18. The final 5-7 percent of in-person time will be stretched out over the next 50 years.

Children grow up and are generally scattered from their parents. Not to mention the fact, that because of this, the older you get, statistically in America, the lonelier you are. Because you've been fed that ultimate freedom and fulfillment is the goal. And it leads to disintegration in your soul, in our communities and in our homes - and it's far from what God had in mind in **Genesis 1**.

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<https://legaljobs.io/blog/divorce-rate-in-america/#:~:text=The%20average%20length%20of%20a,these%20lasts%20for%2022.3%20years.>

For some of you, I don't have to share any statistics to convince you of this. Maybe this reality of broken families and broken marriages is what you're living in. You feel the weight and the heartbreak of it all - and the good news is, God is broken over it too. Jesus, He is with you, and through His Spirit, He's doing something about it by bringing us all together into His forever family. That no matter your background, no matter your family status, through faith in Jesus you are brought into the family of God and nothing can ever separate you from that or break you apart from this forever family.

**So knowing this, that we've been redeemed by God the Father, through Jesus His Son in the power of the Spirit...how can we step into this Genesis 1 "same team" vision in our homes?**

Let me offer three things I see in Scripture:

### **1 - Creating Family Rhythms**

Taking the spiritual practices and infusing them into our home as something we do together. Building rhythms into your home that are intentional to help shape our home into a home that looks like Genesis 1. We're a family who isn't perfect, who strives to love Jesus, and we're all in this together...so because of that...

- **We come to church on Sundays** - this is what we do together. Mom and dad, waking up early, getting kids dressed, rushing out the door. This is what we do because we want to be a Genesis 1 family.
- **We prioritize LifeGroups** -
- **Opening up our home**
- **Mealtimes** - screens away. Eye contact. Catching up on the day - what was good, what was tough. Family devotionals at the table, start somewhere.
- **Bedtimes** - praying with them and for them. Singing over them.
  - Because my goal as a parent is to not say, "You do whatever you want one day." My goal for them is to grow up to be a healthy, mature adult who values their parents, are embedded in a community, and Lord-willing will grow up to love Jesus and pass these same formation practices down to their kids one day.

Mom and dad -

- **Daily sync ups**
- **One-on-one date time**

### **2- Initiating Conversations**

Not only stepping into these communal practices with your fam, but you're saying, "This is why we're doing it."

**Deut 6** - write it on your walls, set it in your homes - and when your kids ask "Why do we do this" you say "B/c God saved us" Same thing now.

This might mean building a vocabulary in the home. In the same way a sports team has phrases and codes to further instill culture into the team, so that's what we wanna do in our home

"Everything we own we own to share." "Forgiven people forgive people." "We're on what?" "The same team"

As a quick aside, mom and dad, this may mean you both need to have an honest conversation this week to figure out - before we get our kids on the same team, are we on the same team? Do we need to talk through some things and have some hard convos about how we're doing before we think through stuff with our kids?

Shameless plug for our Family Discipleshp team - they're rolling out some cool resources here in the next few weeks that I think is gonna be so helpful for families to start doing this...

### **3 - Establishing Family Traditions**

This was an Old Testament thing. There were seven holidays scattered throughout the year where families would stop their work and rest and celebrate and be together - I added it up - Jewish communities have over a months worth of holidays scattered throughout the year - all embedded with history and meaning.<sup>4</sup> And if you include weekly Sabbaths - it would have been more like 2.5 months worth of parties infused with stories. It was meant to be this family-fortifying/identity-shaping event. "This is who we are" And this was instilled down from generation to generation.

[Lucy growing up had a best friend whose family was Jewish. And her friend and her brother are our age now have an awesome relationship with their parents that we look at and we're kinda jealous of. And I think that was in some, large part because they valued these family traditions. There were certain things year after year that they did together as a family unit, cooked certain things, recited, sang, etc]

I'm hesitant to prescribe anything because I want you to talk to your spouse and figure that out. When it comes to birthdays or holidays or vacations - what can you begin doing so that you can say "this is who we are as a family. This is what we do." And then carry that down from generation to generation.

### **Conclusion**

To wrap up I want to point back to **Ephesians 5**:

#### **Ephesians 5:31-32**

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Marriage is not the goal. Marriage was a symbol of something deeper. It was a mystery for so long, and the mystery has been revealed: it's about Jesus. Jesus is the goal and anyone can get in on this - single, married, divorced, remarried. Solid home or broken home. Children of divorced parents or not. The mystery is revealed. Jesus is King. He is what our hearts long for and He's all our hearts need. And if you want to know what it means to be healthy member of the family of God, look to Jesus, who through His life, death, and resurrection humbly led, and submitted and obeyed in all things to the God the Father so we might walk in newness of life.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jewish-religious-year>