

Fifth Sunday of Easter/Mother's Day

May 14, 2006

Colossians 3:12-21

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Christian Family Life in Light of Jesus' Resurrection

1. Jesus rules
2. God gives roles
3. We dress for success

^{NIV} Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.¹⁸ 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 embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

Fellow Christians,

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus lies at the very heart of our Christian faith. It's because Christ has risen that St. Paul can write here in Colossians: **"For (God the Father) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."** (1:13) Because Jesus, who died, now lives, Paul is able to assure us, **"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us our sins...And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross."** (2:13,15) In Christ our enemies have been defeated, our sins have been forgiven, and our rescue has been accomplished.

This great truth also has implications for every day of our lives. At the beginning of this chapter Paul addresses us as people who have been "raised with Christ." Since that's the case, he encourages us to set our hearts and our minds not on earthly things, but on heavenly things. The same word of God that tells us we've been raised with Christ, guides us in how to live for Christ here on earth. So here on Mother's Day we have God's guidance for Christian families. He tells us 1) Jesus rules, 2) God gives roles, and 3) we dress for success.

1. Jesus rules (v 15-17)

It says here, “*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.*” Jesus’ resurrection produces peace. “Peace be with you!” Jesus said when he appeared to his disciples on Easter evening. Peace is a reality because Jesus by his death and resurrection has reconciled us to God and forgiven our sins. Now we who have the peace of Christ’s resurrection are called to live in peace, more than that, to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. Here Paul uses a word not used very often in the New Testament. “Rule” here does not refer to the reign of a king, but was used to refer to the work of an umpire in athletic contests. A good umpire controls games so that the contestants compete by the rules. Likewise, the peace of Christ is to control our speech and behavior. If there’s ever a question about what should be said or done, we are to seek peace. Quarrelling and strife are of counterproductive, whether in the church or in the family. It’s when peace rules that we can grow and serve God. Ideally, our homes will be bastions of peace as Christ’s peace rules in the heart of each member of the family.

The next verse speaks of another way in which Jesus rules in our families: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*” “Richly” is the key word in this verse. As Christians, we’re going to have *some* contact with God’s word. The question is: Does Christ’s word dwell in us *richly*? Paul is referring to more than the occasional use of the word. And he speaks about reading the word for ourselves and about using the word in Christian music and applying the word to one another. I suppose he could have told us to be “in the word,” but the Spirit led him instead to tell us to let the word dwell *in us*. That’s because God’s word doesn’t just sit on the surface. It penetrates and permeates. It gets through to our hearts and minds, and as his gracious word lives in us, it makes us certain of our pardon before God and empowers us to live in a way that pleases him.

And then there’s a third way in which Jesus rules. “*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus...*” The name of Jesus is everything he’s revealed about himself in the Bible. To do something “in the name of Jesus” means to do it guided by his word, to do it as an expression of faith in the Savior, and to do trusting in his power and grace. “In the name of Jesus” serves as the theme for our worship, for our work, for our relationships, and even for those things we do in our leisure time. All of life becomes an expression of gratitude to the God who saved us. Jesus rules—with his peace, with his word, and with his name as the motive, guide and goal for every good thing we do.

But the determination that Jesus will rule in our family life is too good to go unopposed by the enemy of our souls. The family is under assault these days—and has been for a long time. The past two generations have seen a steady weakening of the family structure. Divorce sunders one family after another, while clueless parents and defiant children play their role in the demolition of an institution that God designed to be the backbone of society. So it’s a good idea, then, to go back to what the Creator of the

family has to say about how he intends families to function. We see here that God assigns us roles in our families.

2. God gives roles

First we read, “*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*” The word “submit” has acquired some negative connotations, as if this command requires women to become doormats and gives men a license to be domineering and harsh with their wives. But that’s not what “submit” means. Jesus submitted to the parental authority of Mary and Joseph. He also submitted to the will of his Father, saying, “**Not my will, but yours be done.**” (Lk. 22:42) In neither case was the Lord diminished by his voluntary submission. To submit here simply means to recognize in attitude, words and actions that God has given husbands authority as head of the household. God’s purpose in giving husbands such authority is to have them use this authority to help and serve their wives and children on the way to heaven. God never gives authority just for authority’s sake. That’s what the disciples mistakenly thought. They figured having authority was a license to order other people around for your own benefit. But, on the contrary, you see how Jesus used his authority as King. He loved us and served us and laid down his life for us.

Of course, it’s much easier for a wife to submit to her husband’s authority when the husband is doing what God requires of him. That’s why God speaks to husbands and says, “*Love your wives.*” If the command to wives to submit is separated from God’s command to husbands to love their wives, all kinds of problems will arise. And it should be clear that this is not a command to husbands to *feel* a certain way about their wives. It’s a command to do those things—the patient, kind, considerate things—that assure a woman that her husband does indeed love her.

Children, you have a role in the family, too. Your role is to obey your parents in everything because this pleases the Lord. God gives you this command because he wants to bless you through your obedience to your parents. By disobeying, you will not only make your parents’ work more difficult, but you will miss out on blessings God gives to those who obey. The command to obey parents “in everything” means that you don’t have to spend a lot of time wondering, “Should I or shouldn’t I obey?” The only exception to this command would be in the case that your parents wanted you to do something sinful. In that case, no authority figure, including parents, is to be obeyed.

And once again, God gives fathers a command that, if obeyed, will make the command he gives to children easier to obey. He says, “*Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*” The dynamic in many families is that it’s the father who finally has to lay down the law to the children. That’s where “Wait until your father gets home” came from, right? But even though we fathers must sometimes use our authority to discipline our children, our children should never be led to doubt that we love them. When we withhold appropriate praise, or use cutting words that brand children as stupid or unlikely to amount to anything, we run the very real risk that our children will become bitter and discouraged. Discipline is more likely to achieve its goal when children know that it comes from a parent whose love for them is undeniable.

It takes just four sentences for the apostle to lay out our roles as husbands and wives and children and parents. Yet there are all kinds of possibilities for going astray: harshness, disobedience, lack of love, disrespect. That's why it's just as important to know how to deal with sin as it is know what God's will is. When we sin, God instructs us to confess our sin to the person we've sinned against and to confess it to God. By saying, "I was wrong; I ask your forgiveness," we take responsibility for our sins and seek to made amends. It's powerful when husbands and wives confess sin to each other and offer forgiveness, when children confess sins against their parents and are assured of forgiveness and, yes, even when parents who have sinned against their children confess their wrongs and seek forgiveness. This is God's method for conflict resolution and there's nothing else like it. At its heart is the command. "*Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"

In this final section I'd like to tell you what the well-dressed Christian family is wearing this year. Really! But I'm not going to recommend a trip to Old Navy or JC Penney. At the beginning of today's epistle Paul speaks of various Christian virtues as if they were articles of clothing. He talks about "putting on" these virtues. It's as if you're standing in front of your closet, trying to decide what to wear. But instead of choosing from various articles of clothing, he asks us to put on love and the virtues that accompany it.

3. We dress for success

Note how Paul addresses us: "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved...*" That is precisely the way God's Old Testament people are described. In love God chose us to be his own. Through Jesus he cleansed us from our sins and made us holy in his sight. In Christ this is our identity. Now if that's the case, then don't you think we should dress appropriately?

That's why Paul encourages us, "*Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*" These words are addressed to all Christians and apply everywhere, but they are especially appropriate in the family. Sins like selfishness, pride, ill will and impatience are as helpful as termites. They chew away at a family. They must be exterminated by repentance and replaced with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. But then comes the inevitable question: What if my spouse or my children or my parents aren't always compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient? Then, Paul says, "*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.*" That is, put up with each other and forgive each other. And we have reason to respond this way because Jesus has put up with us despite our sins and weaknesses and he has forgiven us times without number.

Then there's one final piece of our attire as believers: "*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*" Love is the key characteristic of Christians. Without love, nothing else we do, no matter how great, matters. But we can live in love because we've learned love from our Father. "This is love," the Bible says, "not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Then St. John goes on to say, "**Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**"

I'm sure there will be a variety of ways to celebrate Mother's Day today: gifts, dinners, or a quiet afternoon at home. But here's an idea that has a possibility of bringing benefits that reach beyond this day: Celebrate Mother's Day by recommitting yourself to working toward the Bible's ideal for the Christian family. That is, work with the help of God's Spirit to make yours a family where Jesus rules, where we apply God's guidance for our roles, and where we're dressed for successful family life as our love for the members of our family expresses itself in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. When our family fits this description, God will be pleased and our family will be blessed. Amen.