

“My Family, Your Family, God’s Family”

<u>Occasion</u>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 4 th May 2008 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Colossians 3:18 - 4:1
<u>Reading</u>	Colossians 3:18 - 4:1 Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9
<u>Songs</u>	from Mission Praise: 387, 219, 389, 381 from The Source: 185, 568
<u>Author/Speaker</u>	Paul Rydon

How would you describe a family?

What does it consist of?

In the hilariously funny TV series ‘My Family’,
the family consists of father, Ben and mother, Susan,
constantly trying to score points off one another,
an unmarried daughter, Janey, and her baby,
and two sons,
the older of whom, Nick, is an irresponsible pleasure seeking,
womanising joker,
the younger, Michael, being an irrepressible geek who always fails with girls.
The family is enhanced by an adopted niece, Aby,
who is puppyishly in love with the father’s assistant, Roger, at the dental
practice.

The behaviour of this little lot borders on absurdity most of the time
and consists mostly of deceit and indiscretions,
yet underneath the hilarity and tomfoolery,
runs a thread of family unity which is surprising in today’s society.
Father and Mother disagree frequently, yet they never fall out irrevocably
and the mother displays true motherly care for her offspring.
By contrast, the father appears to have no decent fatherly characteristics at all.

So how does this measure up with your concept of the family
and has the concept of family changed with time?

Surprisingly, ‘No’.

The word 'family' still conjures up in many people's minds,
the concept of a father, a mother and one point two children.
We call that the 'nuclear family'.

The 'extended family' includes grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles,
nephews, nieces and cousins,
Together with step-mothers, step-fathers,
step-brothers & sisters
and step-everything-else

In many cultures this concept of family is very strong,
and where it is, the father and grandfather are often highly regarded
and assume authority over the whole family.

In the West, however,
disintegration of the family is very marked
and we have lost the traditional family structure,
and there seems to be little if any authority left in the family at all.

During the run-up to the election for the mayor of London,
We learned that Ken Livingston had five children by three mothers
and that Boris Johnson's record was not that different.

And this is what we see all around us.
The 'family' now can often consist of a number of children by different fathers,
living with one mother
and a man who isn't the father of any of them,
and fathers spend their weekends entertaining their own children
who don't live with them any more.

Now, I don't wish to be judgemental here.
We live in a day when there are enormous pressures on marriage and on the family
and there is no consensus
no social pressure on families to stay together.

But we do have to ask ourselves as Christians,
'Is this how God meant it to be?'
And the answer is a resounding 'No'.

But before I go on,
there is something I have to say.
Many years ago, when I preached on this subject before,
one or two ladies in the congregation were cross with me.
They complained, and justly so,
that in my discussion of the family,
I had made no allowance for those,
who through no fault of their own
had become single mothers,
either through widowhood or by an errant father.
They were struggling to maintain a family,
without a father, against the odds.

To them, and others like them,
I again apologise.
I understand that we are often put in a position either by circumstance,
or by the actions of others,
where we struggle to live up to own standards,
let alone God’s.
We live in a broken and dysfunctional society,
where we will always, however hard we try,
compromise God’s standards.
And all of us here this evening need to acknowledge that to God here and now,
before we go on.
That is why we need a Saviour.

So when we come to our passage for this evening,
that is exactly where we start.
We start by considering our position,
as those redeemed by Christ.

Last week, we looked at the earlier part of this chapter
and under our Pastor’s teaching,
we were reminded of our unique position
as those who have been ‘raised with Christ’
and of our responsibility as such to set our minds on things above.

Let’s just run over the content of verses 1 to 17 of chapter 3. (Colossians 3:1-17)

So as we come to verses 18-25,
we must read them in the context of what has gone before.

We also read Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9,
where the Apostle Paul gives a fuller treatment of the subject.

Verse 18: ‘Wives submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.’

Wow!

In our egalitarian society to preach on such a subject is to offend all good-living
humanists
and to invite condemnation from the 21st century thought police.
Yet here it is in our Bibles
and if we are serious about following Christ we need to sit up and take notice.

Now the first thing to note is that there can be here no suggestion of inequality.
Paul has just said that
“here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised,
barbarian Scythian, slave or free,
but Christ is all and in all.

Paul is absolutely clear that there is no fundamental inequality between men and
women.
In Galatians he says that

‘there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ’. (Galatians 3:28)

Yet he insists both here and in Ephesians and in Titus, (Ephesians 5:22)
that wives submit to their own husbands. (Titus 2:5)
And Peter in his first epistle agrees with him. (1 Peter 3:1)

Now it has to be said that Christians and theologians disagree over the interpretation of this matter.

Some argue that Paul and Peter are merely reinforcing the stereotypes of their age and that in our enlightened understanding of equality, such edicts do not apply.

Others argue that as the edict, especially in Ephesians follows a statement of equality, there can be no substance in the injunction.

If you look at the Ephesians verses, we read, “Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence to Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)
Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as unto the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22)
Hence, they argue, the mutual submission of verse 21 can be carried over and influence verse 22, implying that submission between husband and wife is also mutual.

But if we look carefully at the Ephesian text, we see that that cannot be. For Paul justifies his exhortation on the basis that the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is head of the church. (Ephesians 5:23)
And he goes on to say that “as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:24)

So suddenly this whole relationship between a woman and her husband is elevated as an example of the relationship between the Church and Christ. And the principal of headship in the family is likened to that which exists between Christ and his church. What was at first a mere edict about the human relationship now takes on a level of responsibility which at first it didn’t seem to carry.

And with that in view we turn to the men. “Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them.” (Colossians 3:19)

Here we see the true balance of Scripture. Think about it. How can any woman be expected to submit to a husband who doesn’t love her. Many do.

Many husbands are brutes to their wives, and women are cowed into submission, but that is not how it should be.

Notice that the wife is not instructed to love her husband any more than husbands are told to force their wives into submission.

These rules are not intended to be enforced by the other spouse,
but rather fulfilled voluntarily as is fitting under the headship of Christ.

Again if we turn to the Ephesian text,
the husband’s love is compared to the love that Christ has displayed to his church
and the human relationship is raised to another plane altogether.

Notice, in Ephesians, how Paul waxes lyrical about the love Christ has for his church:
Read Ephesians 5:25-27

And then he says to the husband
that this is the kind of love that you should bestow on your wife.
Come on guys, when did you last tell your wife that you love her?
When did you set out to let her know,
that to you she is the most special person in the world?

So, where there is love and order in the marriage,
there will be love and order in the family.
As the children emerge into a world of conflict,
their first view of life will be one of harmony.
The love and respect between the parents
produces a safe environment in which they can thrive.

Paul exhorts children to obey their parents,
explaining that such obedience is pleasing to the Lord. *(Colossians 3:20)*
In Ephesians, Paul recalls the commandment of God for children to honour their
father and mother, ‘that it may go well with them’.
God will reward those children who honour and obey their parents.

Five youths stand in the dock accused of murder.
They had been damaging cars in a suburban road late one evening,
when a father,
followed by his daughters,
went out to remonstrate with the boys.
But the boys turned on him,
and in front of his daughters,
punched and kicked him to death.

On another occasion a young couple,
dressed in the 'Goth' style,
were walking home across a park.
For no apparent reason except perhaps for their dress,
a gang of youths provoked a fight with the lad and set about him.
When the police arrived later,
the two youngsters were so badly disfigured
that at first they could not identify their gender.
They both died of their injuries.
The girl had cradled her boy-friend's head in her arms,
pleading with them to stop,
but they beat her up too.

Where were their fathers?

Before she died,
the American comedienne, Lucille Ball was asked in an interview,
"Lucille, you've lived a long time and you're a wise person.
What's happened to our country?
What's wrong with our children?
Why are our families falling apart?
What's missing?"
"Papa's missing" she replied, without a moment's hesitation.
"Things are falling apart because Papa's gone.
If Papa were here, he would fix it!"

Lyndon Johnson once said,
"History and instinct tell us that a society that does not encourage responsible
fatherhood will pay for its failure in future generations".

So, sit up, Dads, you've got a big job to do.

Paul tells fathers not to 'embitter their children,
or they will be discouraged'. Colossians 3:21)

And in Ephesians, to
'bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.' (Ephesians 6:4)

Fathers are important in the rearing and training of their children.

A real Father brings a manly influence into the home.
Yet I wonder how many kids are being brought up today
without their father at home,
and the man who is ,
isn't their father.

How many kids can say,
"when my dad comes home, he'll fix that"
and he does?

Fathers, we have a unique role in society,
as the leaders of our families under God.

Are we the kind of Dads that our kids look up to?
Are we good role-models for them?
Do they look to us for guidance in their lives.
Do they put their faith in us,
and do we deserve their confidence?

Finally then, Paul turns his attention to the slaves.

These men and women were an integral part of many households in Paul’s time.

As always,
there were good slaves and bad,
and good masters and evil ones.
Slaves had virtually no rights
and were regarded as chattels in society
and often treated little better than animals.

In New Testament times, the church was often home-based,
so the slaves as well as their masters would be members of the church.
Once again Paul addresses the subordinate first.

“Slaves obey your earthly masters in everything” (Colossians 3:22)

Paul speaks into the social order of his time
and appears to accept that it is ordained of God,
but in his exhortations,
he elevates the slave to true humanness
with a duty before God to act responsibly.

Hence he commands obedience,
integrity,
and hard work.

He instructs them to serve their masters
as though they were serving the Lord.

He then goes on to tell the Masters
that they should treat their slaves well
and give them all that is right and fair.

The point is made that both Slave and Master are servants of the same Lord.
However different their station in social and cultural terms,
they are brothers in Christ,
and should respect each other as such.

For God is no respecter of persons.
In his eyes every individual is equal.

And so the whole household is brought under the headship of Christ.
Whatever our place in society,
wherever we stand in the hierarchy of life,
we all serve the same God
and are accountable to the same Lord.

In God's order,
the husband is given the awesome responsibility of providing leadership for
his family.
He does that,
not in an overbearing way,
but in humility, submitting himself to his Lord,
remembering that those he leads are his equals in the sight of God
and should be nurtured and nourished as His people.
He is commanded to love his wife
and she to submit to his Godly headship.

That love is to be inspired by the love that Christ demonstrates to his bride,
the church,
in that he gave himself for us.
His was the greatest sacrifice of all time,
in that he laid down his life so that we might live
for him and with him forever.

Such love requires that we live our lives
as though unto him.
That our relationships are submitted to him
so that our love for one another and for those within our care
reflects his wonderful love.

Many regard Paul's teachings in these verses as harsh
and unrealistic in the modern age,
but I urge you to accept them in humility
and love for the Lord.

We are truly fulfilled when we live our lives in accordance with his will.

May God himself give us the grace and will to do so.

Amen

Paul Rydon – 4 May 2008