



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Colossians 3: 18 – 4: 1

Lesson 13 of 15

2018

"Happy Home"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark. Well, from the turkeys on my tie, it's Thanksgiving week. I did not choose this passage for Thanksgiving, but in the providence of God we have a passage in which Paul gives us instruction on the family, and certainly, Thanksgiving is a time for family gatherings. And so, we come to verse 18 of Colossians chapter 3, and will read through verse 1 of chapter 4. Paul writes:

¹⁸Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

²⁰Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so they will not lose heart.

²²Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters... *(this, I think, is within the context of the home; servants within the home. And so that is the reason I include it in the entire lesson.)*

²²Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

¹Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank You for this time together, this Sunday before Thanksgiving, when families get together and give thanks for so many things that You have given to us. And we do rejoice in that, Father. We are a nation that has been blessed abundantly – perhaps more – at least in material things and in peace and freedom within our borders – more than most, maybe any – and we give You thanks and praise for that. And make us a thankful people, because we, especially as the children of God, have reason to be thankful beyond anything in this world, beyond any of the material things. We have eternal life in Your Son. And even when there is separation from family members through death, we know that's temporary, that we will be reunited again with our loved ones in Christ. And so, we give You thanks for that and for so many things that we have.

But, Lord, make us thankful. That is one of the great problems that Your people have. They cease being thankful; they take things for granted—and they drift. May we not do that. So, remind us of the good blessings You've given us and help us to focus on those things.

And we will do that, to some degree, in our lesson this morning: For we are reminded of our responsibilities as wives and husbands, and fathers, parents, children. But what a blessing the family is and something for us to be grateful for. Bless our families in this season.

Father, we thank You for the spiritual life that You have given us as well as the material things that You provide for us, and we can look to You with confidence to know that You will continue to do that. And as we look at our prayer requests, we think of those who are recovering from surgery, some whose names aren't listed, some who are going to be facing it. And, Lord, you know our needs; You know where we are in our lives spiritually and materially, and we look to You to provide for the material things we need—and most importantly, the spiritual things.

Bless us in this hour now as we study together and as we look at this text together. Bless us with instruction and enlightenment—not only that we may understand our responsibilities but also have the desire and the will to do what we need to do. Help us realize that our lives are an example of Your grace and that they are an opportunity to be a witness before the world. So Lord, we pray that You bless our time together now and be glorified in it; and we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Mystery writer Agatha Christie thought she had the key to a good marriage. She said, "An archaeologist is the best husband any woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her." And she would know; she married an archaeologist. They met while she was visiting the famous death pits of Ur in Iraq, (one of the more romantic spots on the globe!). He was 26; she was 40.

Well, we all want a good marriage and a happy home, but Paul had a better way than archaeology: it's Christianity. As Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Faith in Jesus Christ not only changes individuals, it changes homes." And that is the subject of the final portion of Colossians chapter three—and it is an important one. God established the family in the garden—it is biblical and the basic unit of civilization. Even the pagans recognized that the family was a stabilizing element in society. They wrote a lot about it even in Paul's day and even earlier. In the East, Confucius said, "The strength of a nation is derived from the integrity of its home."

And yet the home is under attack, and has been under attack from the beginning, when the serpent drove a wedge between Adam and Eve. But it seems especially so now and as a result, a good marriage and a happy home are becoming less common; which also means that one of the greatest witnesses the Church can have to the world is a spiritually whole and healthy family. Clearly Paul thought so; he wrote on the family in Ephesians chapter five, and now here in Colossians chapter three. He wrote to Christians and he lists here the duties of those in the family—and his instruction is simple: 'wives be submissive; husbands are to be loving; children are to be obedient;

and fathers are to be understanding.' It's all very straightforward. But that is not the whole of it.

It is not, 'These are the rules! Now do them.' The Christian duties are based on Christian doctrine. And in chapter three, Paul is applying the doctrine he gave in the previous two chapters. So, Paul's instruction to the family is based on the instruction that he has already given. That means the incentive for good behavior in the family is the same as the incentive for Christian conduct in the church body and the world in general.

He reminded us that we are a 'new creation'; so, we should behave like it. We should behave differently. "...since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self..." (3:9-10), so live like it. —That is the gist of his instruction. And one of the main points he made earlier in this chapter in verses 9 through 14, is "put on love". We are not the people we once were. So, we are to stop living the way that we used to live. We have died; we are new creatures, and this new life of ours is hid with Christ in God. We are new people with new abilities. Christ is in us; that's the mystery that He stated and explained earlier in chapter one—and we are 'in Him'. So we need to understand this to know who we are, reckon it to be true, and walk by faith in that truth. And as we do that, the Lord will supply. He blesses faith; He blesses obedience.

That is the basis for Paul's instruction here, which begins with the wife and her duty. A duty which is demanding and a responsibility that requires the grace of God and the grace that He does supply: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." (vs18). Now, I suspect that there are few statements in the New Testament that are more jarring to modern ears than this statement, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands.' And there are some reasons for that when we read about domestic violence in society today with physical and verbal abuse that happens in the home. Marriages are full of tragedy and always have been.

But probably the greater cause of offense is a misunderstanding of the word "subject", the notion of 'submission'. It suggests subjugation; it suggests suppression,

maybe images of slavery. That's not at all the idea here. Paul is not saying, 'Wives, never speak and always keep ten paces behind your husband.' What he is saying is, 'Honor your husband and respect his leadership.' Submitting in the home is not about equality or inequality of the sexes or personal value; it is about her role or responsibility. Men and women have the same origin; they are equal in person and value. We are made of the same stuff, but to have different functions in marriage. The husband is the head of the home, and the wife is his helper. When God created Eve, He said, "I will make him a helper suitable for him." (Gen 2:18). That word "suitable" means 'corresponding to'. She was to 'complete' what was lacking in him.

So, literally, that word 'submit' is 'put under', to put oneself under him. Not under his heel but under his leadership, because the man could not and cannot function without the woman. Together they become one. The woman is the other half of the one. They are two halves of the whole. She is as valuable as the man is, but she has a different function.

Now, the proof of that, the proof of the equality of value, at least for the Christian, is in 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 3, where Paul says, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." There is an order to everything. And what he says here is that God is the head of Christ but not greater in value than Christ. The Father is not greater in value than the Son; both are God, equal in essence and power. But within the Trinity they have a different function. You have the 'ontological Trinity', which speaks of that there is one God who subsists in three persons; they are equal in power and glory, and in eternity, but they have an economical function. That is the economical Trinity; they have different functions: Christ is the mediator between God and man. Christ serves the Father as the Holy Spirit serves the Son by speaking of Him and glorifying Him – that's John chapter 16, verses 13 and 14. But all three are equal in Deity, and all three are equal in value.

This is the same with the wife and husband. She is his equal in essence, in person, but not in authority. The husband is the head of the home. Paul said that in 1

Corinthians 11, verse 3. He repeated it in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church...". This is the basis of his statement here, where he repeats it again in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 18.

Now, male headship is not a dictatorship. I had to make this point last night. We had a wedding here, a beautiful wedding, and I went through Ephesians five, and went through the responsibilities of the wife and made the distinction that it is not 'subjugation' that she is to undergo. And the husband is not given the privilege of dictatorship; it's not tyranny that he is given. These were the things, that 20 years ago, I did not have to mention. But now I must make these kinds of distinctions. Now I must be clear that being married is not license for the man to be a tyrant or a dictator, but rather follow the duty that the husband is given according to verse 19, where Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them."

Paul explains the nature of love in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 25. He is speaking there to husbands, and he tells them how they are to love their wife: He says, "...as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up *for* her..." In other words, the husband is to love his wife like Christ loved the church, which means he is to love his wife sacrificially. Christ laid down His life for His bride, the church. He "emptied Himself," Paul told the Philippians (2:7). Christ humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He loved His bride so much that he went to the most shameful instrument of execution there was in the world of that time, and He emptied Himself. And His goal, in all of that, was to 'present the church', as Paul goes on to explain in Ephesians five, "...in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless." (vs27).

Now, that's the standard for husbands, and it suggests a lot of things. One is fidelity. His love for his wife is love for her alone, as Christ's was for the church alone. He didn't die for the world at large, but for the world of His elect, His bride. If it were not so, then Paul's analogy here would break down and make no sense. His love is not divided; it is particular; it is for the church, for those whom the Father gave to Him.

And it is a faithful love; it's active love; it's purposeful love to present her holy and blameless. And it's selfless love. Headship in marriage is not for the husband's personal benefit, but for the wife's edification, among other things. But to the context here, it is for the wife's edification. It is for blessing her. It is for exhibiting Christ to her, which would involve leadership, especially in spiritual matters. So, to be a good husband, he has to be conscience of his role, and in being conscience of that, knowing the Word of God, understanding the doctrines of the faith and how they apply to our lives. Doctrine always applies. We see that in all of Paul's letters. We see that here in Colossians; he lays out the doctrines of the faith in the first two chapters, and then he applies them in the next two chapters. And a husband needs to be able to do that, know that, and understand that. That's a big responsibility.

Now, that's the ideal I recognize. Paul knows we are not perfect. Life is busy, schedules are crowded and complicated; Paul knew that. He was not an idealist. He sets before us the ideal and the goal we need to strive for—but he knew that we are not perfect. Paul is a realist and that is very clear from the warning that he gives to husbands that completes verse 19, "...love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Were there some specific problems in Colossae that Paul was addressing? Maybe. But Paul was a student of human nature. They didn't have to have particular problems in Colossae to know that there are problems. Every relationship, whether it's a husband and wife relationship, or a business relationship, or just a relationship of friends, they all can have problems because we are people, and we are sinners—and that happens. That's what we are: saved sinners.

So, he knew there would be problems in marriage. Wives would fail to meet a husband's expectations, and some husbands, (many husbands probably), are unreasonable people. They can be selfish people. Whatever the cause of the tensions, Paul counseled husbands to be gentle. "...do not be embittered against them." This can also mean, 'Do not be harsh with them.' Christ is patient with us. We are to be patient with each other: husbands with wives, wives with husbands. And I know that.

I walked out of the house today, after going in and kissing my wife goodbye; very sweetly. She was sound asleep, so, I didn't want to disturb her. I crept out of the house but heard a sound as I opened the door and realized that I had forgotten to turn off the alarm. I ran back in to do it and noticed a figure in the hallway...She didn't say anything, so I said, "Sorry, sweetheart, sorry." So, wives need to be patient with husbands as well.

But Paul is directing this passage to the husband, not the wife, because he had all of the advantages. Certainly he had them in Paul's day and he's saying, 'Don't use those advantages selfishly.' Even when the wife has offended, be loving, be patient, be kind. Show the fruit of the Spirit, not the deeds of the flesh.

Now, the Bible reveals a lot more about the roles of husbands and wives. A wife is not a mere domestic who cooks and cleans and has babies and follows her husband. She is the man's helper, his assistant in the work of the family. When the man is wrong, she needs to correct him, and he needs to receive that correction. There are some notable examples of that in the Bible. Samson's mother had clear insight – and I'd say clearer insight than Samson's father Manoah. She was able to calm him down with good theology and clear logic when, in Judges 13, they witnessed a theophany. When the angel of the LORD went up in the flame, Manoah realized "...we have seen God." and said, 'Now we are going to die.' Well, she said, 'Wait a minute, if we were going to die, we would already be dead. That's not going to happen.' She calmed him down with her theology. She had more insight than he did.

Abigail is described in 1 Samuel 25 as "intelligent and beautiful." She saved her husband Nabal's life. He is Nabal, the fool, (that's what 'Nabal' means), —and he was a fool. But she saved his life when, by her wisdom, she calmed David's anger, prevented him from committing a slaughter; she saved Nabal from David—and really saved David from himself. David quickly understood and was very grateful. She was a wise woman.

Pilate's wife warned him, while he was on the judgment seat, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man." But he didn't listen, to his own downfall.

Best example, I think, is Sarah telling Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. She knew they were a danger to Isaac, the son of promise. Abraham resisted, but God told Abraham, "Listen to Sarah."

A good wife is a blessing, and a wise man will listen to her advice. He is responsible to lead the family and cannot abdicate that responsibility, but he needs the help and support she can give. She should be encouraged to use her gifts. A woman, just like a man, has natural gifts and natural abilities, and yet Paul is speaking to the Christian marriage, those in Christ. He's not giving instruction on the worldly marriages; he's speaking to us in the Church. And so, the wife has spiritual gifts as well, and she should be encouraged to use her gifts and abilities. She is vital in training the children and managing the home. Proverbs 1 and Proverbs 31 make that clear, "An excellent wife who can find?" I don't know what my life in ministry would be like without my wife of 41 years. She has been a blessing to me; that's true.

Look, books are written on this subject. Courses are given on it, and I've got 15 minutes for it in a sermon, hardly enough time, but here's the lesson; it is simple: Husbands, love your wives. Wives, honor your husbands. It is a symbiotic relationship; one helps the other; both help each other. More importantly than the logic of it, as I'm trying to explain – more importantly is that is the instruction of the Word of God. And so, the application to us in light of that is we are not to listen to the siren song of the world; we are to listen to the Word of God. When both the husband and wife take their responsibility seriously, when they realize, 'This is God's Word, and this is His direction for us, the Creator of everything, the One who established marriage and family, when He gives us instruction, we are to follow Him.'

And when we do that, when we take it seriously and see it as a ministry and do it as unto the Lord, then the husband and wife will fulfill this pattern (before us here and in Ephesians five), God will bless them and their marriage will flourish. And what a witness that will be to the world. It is intended to be that; Paul makes that point in Ephesians five: in your marriage, the world will see Christ and the Church; in your

marriage, the world will see the grace of God exhibited. That's Paul's hope for the Colossians.

He then moves from husbands and wives to parents and children. First to children in verse 20, "Be obedient," he says, "in all things...". And why is that? Well, he could have given reasons such as it's the healthy way to live; it's the wise way to live. But his reason is, "...for this is well-pleasing to the Lord." This brings glory to God. This is the instruction of Moses in the Law; it's the fifth commandment. It's repeated here, "Honor your father and mother," and this is what Paul is drawing upon.

It is the instruction of Solomon in the Proverbs 1:8, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching." So, you see there, at the beginning of the Proverbs, you have husbands and wives with this responsibility of training up the children and teaching them. And he repeats that instruction in Proverbs 6, verse 20, "My son, observe the commandment of your father." Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, teach children to obey their parents.

Paul said, "in all things." Obviously, he means all things that are legal, all things that are righteous and good. Only that is pleasing to the Lord. Paul didn't need to explain that to Christian parents, but he did need to stress to children – and to their parents who would oversee their development – that they needed to be obedient sons and daughters because that is not what children want to be. We all enter the world fallen. It's in our nature to rebel. That is true of the cutest little baby and every one of our boys and girls and grandkids. Proverbs 22, verse 15, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child." And the scary thing is, foolishness will stay there and only grow if parents don't teach their children and discipline them. And the result will be, if we don't do that, children who brought great joy will bring lasting sorrow. Doting parents pave a path of tears for themselves if they give to their sons and daughters only unfettered affection. Give great affection; we should do that, but if that is all we give, we are going to have problems. The Proverbs warn of grief to a father and bitterness to a mother.

Discipline is necessary. Instruction is necessary, but it requires wisdom and effort. A heavy rod can be as harmful as no rod at all. That's the warning of verse 21, where Paul says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children so that they will not lose heart." Well, that would include mothers also, but fathers are addressed because they were the authorities in a Roman home. In fact, a father in a Roman home, had absolute authority over his family. And I mean absolute authority. He could sell them into slavery if that was his choice. He could even inflict the death penalty on his child. That's the kind of authority he had. So, Paul's counsel here would have surprised many fathers, but it recognized that when authority is exercised without restraint, it can make the home 'a factory of despair', someone said, 'rather than a college of growth'.

Consider Christ. What did He say? "...I am gentle and humble in heart...", "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Mat 11:29&30). There is a yoke; there are principles of conduct that we must follow. Obedience is not an option in the Christian life, but our Master leads us and teaches us and even disciplines us with wisdom and care and understanding and gentleness. That is the model for parents. Paul's advice to them – to fathers explicitly, but also implicitly to mothers – don't exasperate them. Don't wear them down and cause them to lose heart. That can happen in a variety of ways.

Kent Hughes, in his study on the book of Colossians, gave some examples which are not uncommon. One cause of discouragement is criticism – not just correction, but continual criticism. Some parents think that the way to motivate a child to work and to achieve is to tell him or her that they are not working hard enough and not achieving enough. I think sometimes that's a business model that people use. You just keep driving people; they have got to give more and more—and that can be discouraging. When there is no encouragement, when no improvement is acknowledged, a child can conclude that he or she can never do enough—can never do well enough.

Now, I realize that our society has gone a little far to the other extreme and has so prioritized self-esteem that everyone gets a trophy, and no one is a loser. That is not

real or helpful. But when there is no encouragement, a child loses incentive and loses heart.

Another kind of father who exasperates his child is one who acts out of anger or irritation. A bad day at the office can spill over into the family. That is everyone at times; we all have that, but it has consequences.

A third way that children can lose heart, and maybe Paul had this specifically in mind, is from overly strict parenting. Christian parents can be so protective of their children that they restrict children from everything. A comment on that Kent Hughes wrote, "Rather the parent should be looking for opportunities to say yes to as many things as he or she can conscientiously say yes to." In other words, look for opportunities to let your children do things.

Now, look, there are reasons we have to say 'no', and the reasons for saying 'no' to requests are matters of safety, morality, and health. But 'over strictness', even from genuine love, can produce resentment and cause rebellion. So, again, parenting is hard work. It calls for wisdom. It is not like there is a formula that you follow. You have to be wise in that. Children differ and it requires a great deal of wisdom and personal involvement. And I would emphasize that. A father needs to spend time, (and the mother as well, but the subject here is the father), he needs to spend time with his sons and daughters. It is not enough to love them; you must like them and enjoy their company. There's no substitute for spending time with your children, talking to them about life, talking to them about the Lord. Absentee fathers who are too busy with work will someday realize they were too busy with work.

The psalmist said, "Children are a gift from the Lord" (Ps 127:3), and that's true. One fact the Old Testament makes clear, especially the book of Genesis, is God causes conception; He gives children. Now, nothing seems more natural in life than childbirth, but the reality is that it is supernatural. It is what God produces and they are a gift. Parents will be held accountable for how they took care of the great gift God gave to them. And if fathers aren't diligent about training and disciplining their children, it will not go well. It may not go well anyway, even when parents are diligent.

Charles Wesley wrote a friend, "Nothing but grace can keep our children, after our departure, from running into a thousand sects and a thousand errors," and that's S-E-C-T-S – groups, cults – and a thousand errors. And that's true. The danger never goes away. We can prepare them for what's coming, but ultimately, children, young people, you are responsible for your lives. So, obey your parents. At a young age, obey your parents. And parents, be understanding of your children.

In verse 22, Paul moves to the duties of Christian slaves. Rome's economy was based largely on slave labor: From manual labor, what we normally associate with slavery, backbreaking kind of labor; to skilled professions, professions of teachers and physicians – lots of them were slaves. Slavery was an established institution when the Church was founded. The New Testament tolerated it but didn't encourage it. The mission of the Church was saving souls, not reforming society. But as hearts were changed, society was changed. And when the gospel entered slavery, slavery was affected. Masters and slaves became brothers and sisters in Christ. So, while the slave-master relationship continued within the home, it ended in the Church. What an unusual situation. The slave had his duties to perform; he had to do this and that. And then they go off to church, and now they are equals. And maybe the slave stands up in the meeting, and he instructs the master, and he leads in worship, and he distributes the elements of the Lord's Supper.

Paul said, in verse 11, 'There is no distinction between slave and freeman.' Paul was not sympathetic with slavery. In fact, if freedom were offered, Paul advised a slave to take it; that's 1 Corinthians 7, verse 21. But if it were not, he did not counsel revolt; not only because rebellion would have been answered with blood and iron but because their slavery was an opportunity for service. That is how he saw things, and that was his counsel. "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth..." (vs22). And Paul was consistent with that.

Remember, this is one of the prison epistles and when Paul wrote this letter, he was in chains in Rome. He is a prisoner, but he didn't try to break out of jail. Instead, he

lived the Christian life there in prison, and he lived it with joy, and he gave the gospel. And because of that, the gospel spread. And Paul speaks of this in Philippians chapters 1:13 and 4:22. It spread throughout their praetorian guard and even into Caesar's household. That was the providence of God that put him there, in that place in Rome, where he would have access to people, he would not have had access in any other way. But in the providence of God, God put him there, and God blessed his ministry, and the gospel spread to unusual places. And so, he told slaves in that condition 'be obedient'. As Paul saw it, in God's providence, people were saved in slavery, and that situation was a unique opportunity to be a witness to masters and their families in their homes. That is what Paul counseled.

He knew one problem that a slave had was motivation. He worked sometimes backbreaking jobs without pay or reward. And the result of that might be that he would work only when the master was watching. You see that, in modern situations. You see it, for example, under communism. And I had some experience with that when I would travel to Romania back in the 1980s. This was when it was still a communist country; this was before the overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu. And the people there said, "We have a joke, and the joke is 'the state pretends to pay us, and we pretend to work.' ". Well, it turns out it was a joke all over Eastern Europe and Russia, but they would pretend to work because there was no motivation to work, and that was the reality for slaves.

But as Paul saw it, this was an opportunity to rise above that and be different and to stand out by one's diligence and work. In spite of the hardship, that's what they were to do. And I think we can apply that to our own day. As Christian workers, we are not to be what F. F. Bruce called "clock watchers," people who just put in our time. We are to do what we do with excellence; we are to do it, as Paul puts it here, "fearing the Lord."

We should do that in everything. That's what Paul says next in verses 23 and 24, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ

whom you serve." Now, that puts things in a different light. We serve Christ, and He is a good Master. We can't do anything in His name or make any sacrifice in His name that He will not repay us far beyond anything that we have lost, or any energy we have expended in this life or the next. He will reward us now and then—and especially in the life to come. If we live by faith, that means something to us. We understand that this life is passing away; it is a brief moment, and the things we do have eternal reward. And that is what he is saying here to these people, to these slaves, and to others.

And, on the other hand, those who don't serve faithfully or well, they will be dealt with as well. Paul is saying that, verse 25, "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality." The Lord will deal with whoever, without partiality, regardless of their station. And that included 'Masters', which he speaks to in chapter four, verse one, instructing them to "...grant to your slaves justice and fairness..." Again, Paul doesn't tell Masters to 'free their slaves'. That I think, though, is implied in the instruction to 'give them justice'. But as F. F. Bruce said, "It would take a long time for the incompatibility of slavery with the gospel to be assimilated into Christian consciousness." A long time. Still, the instruction he did give must have been radical for that age. He was telling Christian masters to treat their slaves not as property but as people who are in the image of God, and therefore, they deserve justice. Now, what a witness that would be to slaves. Christians treated them fairly with kindness. Perhaps that is the reasons so many slaves were a part of the Church, the early Church.

All of this is a model of how the Christian home is to function in regard to husbands and wives, parents and children, and all who work within the home; household slaves then, employees and employers now. That model and example is needed today. A year ago or so I read an article in which the writer referred to 'the shockingly rapid disintegration of the American family'. When that happens, the very fabric of society comes apart, and that is the reality we live in today. It is the consequence of fatherless homes—the failure of male leadership. It is a spiritual

problem. The Word of God has long been rejected in this land. As a result, its moral principles and institutions are abandoned. It is the days of the Judges, when you read that refrain, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Interesting, isn't it? You can go back to some of the earliest books of the Bible, go back 3,500 years ago, and the problems then are the problems today, and the reason for those problems are the same today as they were then—spiritual problems.

But in the providence of God, this is the age into which we have been born and we are to bear witness to it. Not a time for fear, but boldness and clarity. We have the truth, and the truth works. What an opportunity to live it before a confused world. What a testimony a godly marriage and a happy home are. It is order in the midst of disorder; it is joy in the midst of joylessness. We have the power to live it, Christ is in us! We serve a God who hears our prayers and blesses faith and obedience. He is the God of providence who arranges events personally in our lives and in our favor. Know that this is the way your family is to look; this is what is to be seen of our families. And know this: we are able; we can do this. Nothing can have a greater influence on society than a church that knows the Bible deeply, profoundly, and lives the Bible openly. That is light in the midst of darkness. We have the answer; God has revealed it. It's the gospel, and that is salvation for the lost and for the doomed. It is the message of salvation in Christ, the Savior who died for sinners.

If you are here without Him, believe in Him. Join yourself to Him and His sacrifice through faith. Turn to Him; He receives all who do with forgiveness and life. And then, by the grace and power of God, serve Him in the place in the role that He's given you—to His glory—and it will be to your blessing. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for the reminder Paul gives us of the importance of the institution of the family and all of the different responsibilities within us. Help us to engage in that, to be obedient. And certainly, for all of us, Lord, there is this underlying lesson, this implication, and that is to listen to the Word of God and obey it—regardless of what the world is saying. Listen to the Lord God and follow Him. May we do that; may we be obedient. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)