



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“THIS HAPPY HOME”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: Colossians 3:12-21
Date: Unknown

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This sermon was preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Colossians 3: 12-21).

Next, review the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and the message of the sermon. The date of this sermon is unknown. As you read it, consider the cultural context to try to determine when it might have been given.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

I. God speaks to us this morning from the letter to the Colossians from the third chapter, the twelfth through twenty-first verses: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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

III. Mother's Day is a secular holiday, not a religious holiday. There is nothing uniquely Christian about being a mother. It happens all the time, and it would be most presumptuous if Christians were to claim the exclusive virtue of motherhood or respect for motherhood. Nonetheless, the Christian tradition has made a unique contribution to the role of women in the life of mankind and in the life of the home.

IV. It must be understood at the time that Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians respectable women were not seen upon the street. Indeed they were chattel to be used by men. They were not even permitted to eat with the men of the family. Even the Hebrews permitted divorce upon the initiation of men for just about any reason, but no woman was given the right to initiate the breaking of this contract.

V. It was in this setting that Paul wrote the words in his letter to the church of Galatia, "There is neither male nor female for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." This does not deny maleness or femaleness but that in Jesus Christ all persons are of equal honor and integrity before God. In these admonitions, that to us seem so elementary and obvious, we find a new understanding. In the Greek world the role of the husband was to rule; the role of the wife to serve; the role of parents to lay down the law, the role of the children to obey. But in these words of Paul we find a new reciprocity. A husband has the right to rule contingent upon his love of the wife and family over whom he has authority. He is to rule over his children not in order to break them but to give them courage and to help them find their fulfillment in Christ. Each privilege has its commensurate obligation and duty.

VI. We find our fulfillment as persons primarily in a personal relationship. Possessions have value only as they contribute to personal relationships. I've never seen any correlation between the accumulation of the world's goods and a sense of fulfillment in life. When a man says he doesn't like his job it's not usually because he objects to the tools nor necessarily even the assignment. The joy of our work lies primarily in our relationship with those with whom we work, whether employer, employee or customer. It is our relationship with people that makes our work of value and fulfilling. Those persons are happy we have found a good relationship with other people, and peace within the life of their home. It is therefore most appropriate that Paul should take time to speak of our Christian relationship within the home; of husband to wife, of parents to child. "Wives, be subject to your husband as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." Paul uses almost these identical words when he writes to the church at Ephesus, but in that Epistle he introduces this section by the words, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

VII. Marriage is a need-meeting contract. We marry because we need a spouse. But if we marry in order to *use* the spouse our opportunities for happiness in that relationship are minimized. What Paul is saying, though marriage is a need-meeting relationship, I marry in order to meet the needs of the other rather than to have *my* needs met *by* the other. I marry not in order to use the person but because, for love of that person, I want to meet her needs. In mutual giving, each subjecting himself to the other, each person's needs are met, and not in the sense of using the partner. The needs of marriage are very real. There are physical needs of the body, of hunger and of sex. There are the psychic needs, of being needed, of being accepted, of one's maleness or femaleness being confirmed and fulfilled. These are all basic and legitimate needs, and when they cannot be met in the home, then men and women look elsewhere for their fulfillment. If a man does not have a sense of being wanted and fulfilled at home, he may try to find that fulfillment in his work, or perhaps in his hobby, or perhaps in his secretary. If a woman does not find life fulfilling at home, if she does not find love and acceptance in her husband, all too often she will try to drain from her children the love that her husband should have given her. That is the tragedy of "smother" love, a love that has turned to the children when it should have turned to the husband. The needs of fulfillment and being accepted are very real and very appropriate needs that normally are met in the home relationship.

VIII. A youngster said "Home is the place where if you go there they have to take you in." In perhaps more sophisticated terms, home is where your acceptance is unconditional, where we are accepted not because of what we have done or what we have been but because of who we are. This is illustrated in the story of the prodigal son. The father did not rush out with a check list and ask his son, "What about those rumors I heard. Is it true? I don't know whether I'll take you in or not." With open arms, he said, "Because you are my son you are mine and are accepted."

- IX.** It is to his home that a man should be able to run to escape the judgments of the marketplace. It is to his home that he should be able to go to tell those about him of the good things that have happened to him that day, where he can announce his victories without people thinking he is bragging. It is a place where he should be able to take his defeats without the fear that he will be hated and rejected. The marketplace where a man must live and work is one that denies him the right to tell his real joys or to open up his real sorrows.
- X.** The uniqueness of Christian love is revealed in the earlier portion of the passage we read this morning, "Forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you." We come into our home, not in order to frighten one another nor to compete with one another, but because of our need for the forgiveness of God we can afford to forgive one another, and we accept one another for *what* we are, and not for what we have accomplished.
- XI.** It is in a home that a man's manliness should be confirmed, sexually, of course, and again I would say that sex is not optional equipment. It is ordained of God and it is to be expected in any healthy home situation. However, beyond the sexual role, a man's maleness is primarily expressed in his capacity to provide for his family. And yet, in how few homes is appreciation ever shown to the father for the bread on the table, the house in which they live, the clothes upon the backs of the wife and children. For many a man there is no more castrating period in the week than the hour in which he gets home, and his wife tells of the things she would like to have bought at the mall today that she couldn't afford, and the things that the children want, but, of course, they'll have to wait because, although their friends have them, our kids can't. They wife is saying, "You are a bad husband. You do not provide like other wives' husbands provide." And the man is less of a man because his manliness has not been confirmed at home. A man needs to have his manliness confirmed. He needs to be reminded that he is a good provider and that there are those who are aware and who appreciate it.
- XII.** The husband has to have some authority in a home. This is part of his male nature. When authority is undercut by the wife -- not necessarily by contradiction in front of the children -- but by snide remarks, he is less of a man than he was before.
- XIII.** But also within the home a woman's womanliness should be confirmed. It is so hard to be a woman in this generation. The unique role of the wife is to become the life giver. In this day of population explosion babies are a drug on the market and any woman is expected to be able to give birth to a baby. There's no sense of real accomplishment in having two or three children, and sometimes if there are more it may even be looked down upon.
- XIV.** The Japanese Consul from Chicago was facing return to Japan and a friend talking with him at the dinner table was asking about his feeling about returning, and there was very grave apprehension on the part of the wife because she said, "We're returning with four children and nice people in Japan just don't have four children." She dreaded returning because she had a large family.

XV. It is difficult for a woman to find her sense of womanliness, her sense of life-giving, her sense of creation. In our community this is one reason why we have craft classes -- in order that in the process of creating beauty, this very basic instinctive nature of the woman may be expressed. So, if your wife brings home a Crisco lid with tole painting on it, tell her it's pretty. She needs it. It is very hard to feel like a woman and to feel competent as a woman in a society that too often does not honor the role of the woman. And because it is so hard to be proud to be a woman many women start competing with men hoping that they can outshine them in their own sphere. And thus we find the castrating housewife and the war between the sexes within the home.

XVI. We're told of a grandmother who thought she'd surprise the family by flying up from Tampa. Arriving home on Mother's Day, she discovered that the family were out at a neighbor's. As she opened the door there was her four-year-old grandson. The grandson looked up and said, "Who are you?" And she said, "I'm your grandmother." He said, "I know my grandmother and you're not her." She said, "But I'm your grandmother on your father's side." He said, "I'm not sure who you are but if you're going to stick around here you'd better be on my mother's side."

XVII. Our women need to be proud of being women and we men have to tell them that. Men are motivated primarily by what they see and touch. Women are motivated primarily by what they hear. It is not enough that we take flowers. They have to hear the words, these women. This is the way they learn. It's part of their nature. It's important that we husbands or sons remind our mothers that they are loved, that they still have beauty and dignity in our lives, that they are our life-givers and we're grateful for them.

XVIII. Marriage has been compared with building a bonfire. At first it starts out with the paper and the kindling that is easily set aflame and it grows and blazes brightly with zest. But the kindling very soon burns out and the question comes, "Will the kindling have caught the logs? Were the logs dry? Were they the right material?" And then we have to start fanning for all we're worth to somehow get the flame of the kindling into the long and enduring embers of the logs. All too often in marriage the kindling is expected to burn forever. When the kindling goes out we are afraid of getting our fingers burned, or smoke in our eyes and we are not prepared to pay the price of fanning for the long and enduring warmth that will come when the material finally catches its glow. It's worth the price, the fanning, the fingers burned, when the honeymoon is over and the price has to be paid for an enduring home and marriage.

XIX. But Paul spoke not only of the relationship of a husband and wife but also the relationships with children. "Children, obey your parents. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." We have said before that the task of parents is to become unnecessary, to work themselves out of a job, to phase out of the lives of their children. This has become true earlier and more completely than ever before. We have assumed that once we send our children away to college, the college will pick up where we left off in the discipling and the nurturing of our children. This is not the case. Once they have left us they are on their own. The Director of Simmons Hall couldn't care less whether Susie comes home tonight. Whether Susie returns to the dormitory will depend entirely upon Susie once she has left high school. Therefore, in the years prior to their graduation from high school our children must have internalized the discipline to carry them beyond. We cannot catapult our children into society. Those of us who have served on aircraft carriers remember that when you get a plane on a catapult you have to get a very tight grip, because the pressure of the catapult is immense and when its power is exerted and all of a sudden that grip is released, it is free on its own. This is not a parable on how to raise children. We cannot raise them by keeping a very firm grip and then all of a sudden let them loose and hope, somehow or other, that momentum carries them.

XX. We who have been on carriers know that we don't send a plane out with a dead engine because no matter how strong the catapult it may go a few feet and then into the drink. Long before the plane starts off its motor is revved up. Even as it is flying there is within that plane the power to fly. It is internalized power that keeps it up. The youngsters who have been getting in trouble in college are not necessarily children who are not disciplined at home. They are not necessarily children who had no rules. They are children for whom discipline was always external, not internal, and when the power was released all of the props that had kept them upright were taken away. There was no internal discipline to carry them. So the period of youth is a period for parents to release the props, of going through the dangers and risky processes of turning over independence to them, so that by the time they graduate from high school, we can say we trust them and we can turn them loose.

XXI. Home is a place where our children should learn the internal discipline that will carry them to the life that lies beyond adolescence. It is a time when they learn their maleness and femaleness. It is hard for a boy to know how to become a man because our children see us in roles that are pretty much interchangeable -- the father does the dishes occasionally, possibly even changing the baby. Our children don't see their fathers in the process of working and providing. I remember when I was in high school I desperately wanted to hit Eddie Freeman in the eye because I knew that if word got around that I had given Eddie Freeman a black eye, everybody would know that I was a real boy. Every youngster wants to be assured of his maleness. There are many boys who grow to maturity never really being sure that they are men. They keep fighting the battle of trying to prove to their wives and to everyone else that they really are men.

XXII. A man cannot be a gentleman until he first knows he is a man, for to be a gentleman he has to take on some of the female aspects of life -- tenderness and creativity. A man is not free to be tender and creative until he has assured himself that he really *is* a man. We parents need to assure our boys more and more by our words and by making them see that they really are boys. Girls need to be assured that they are pretty and that they are becoming womanly. A part of the process is to make love more in front of our children. We Scots are so inhibited. Our children need to see the father as the lovemaker and the mother as the receiver of that love. They need to see a mother and father kissing one another for this is a part of being male and female. They have a right to observe the expression of love and to see the pattern that they some day, God willing, will follow. A boy is not free to be a man until he really knows he has become a man. A girl doesn't change into a woman until, within the home, she has had her womanliness confirmed over and over again. The fact of the matter is that all of us -- father, mother, boy, girl -- are constantly involved in self-negation and wonderment and it should be in the home that we find the assurance over and over again of our worth, of our manliness, our womanliness, our acceptance within the family and within society.

XXIII. Living in the home is a religious matter where being a husband and wife is not just a contract between two persons. In a Christian home, in a home ordained of God, it is a three-way contract if it is to be blessed of God. Our children are not the product nor are they the possession of the father and mother but a gift of God loaned to them. It is a three-way relationship for life is God's gift. It is in the sight of God that our homes take on reality and meaning and love. It is within this gift that we find our fulfillment.

Study Questions -- Part I

Bible Reading: Colossians 3:12-21

Colossians 3:12 says: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

- The phrase God's chosen people is frequently used in the Bible. What does it mean to you today?

Colossians 3:13 says: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

- This reflects a portion of the Lord's prayer. What makes it hard for you to forgive others?
- What can you do to make that forgiveness a blessing for both of you?

Colossians 3:15 says: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. "

- What concrete actions can you take to let the peace of Christ rule your heart?
- "And be thankful." Why do you think Paul and Timothy make that a sentence unto itself?

Colossians 3:16 says: "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."

- Do you agree that teaching and admonishing go together? Why? Why not?

Colossians 3:17 says: "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. "

- What have you done in the last few days that you would be proud to say you did in His name?
- How can you work to avoid doing things you would not want people to think of in the same breath as Jesus?

Colossians 3:18 says: "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. "

- How do you think the context of the times is reflected in this verse?
- How might it be written today?

Colossians 3:20-21 says: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

- Why do you think this is a paired set of verses?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon:

Paragraph III:

The sermon is undated yet this paragraph speaks about Mother's Day. Would you have chosen this as a reading for that day? Is there another reading you might have chosen for that occasion?

Dr. Galbreath notes that the "Christian tradition has made a unique contribution to the role of women in the life of mankind and in the life of the home." How would you describe that contribution?

Paragraph IV:

This reflects on the role of women at the time Paul wrote the letter. What parallels do you see between his description and the plight of women in some parts of the world today?

Paragraph V:

Dr. Galbreath quotes Paul as saying "There is neither male nor female for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." How do you think denominations that prohibit female ordination or involvement in the ruling of the church reconcile this verse to their actions?

The text reflects on the interpretation of the time being based on Greek society. Based on the text in paragraph V, in what decade do you think this sermon was likely delivered?

Paragraph VI:

Think about the comments related to how people feel about their work. How would you describe your feelings toward your work -- whether in or out of the home? Do the people you work with know about your identity as a Christian? Would they find that surprising based on your professional demeanor?

It is noted that the wording in this passage is almost identical to a passage in Ephesians. Bible scholars seem to suggest that both letters were written at nearly the same time, although some believe Ephesians might have been written by a student of Paul's up to 20 years later. Do you think the additional passage shows a refinement in his thinking? Do you think he omitted it from Colossians intentionally? Or do you think it was omitted accidentally?

Paragraph VII:

With so much attention in the paparazzi-driven press on the indiscretions of celebrities, how do you feel about Dr. Galbreath's comment that when needs are not being met at home, men and women look elsewhere for their fulfillment? What does this suggest about who has failed in what ways?