

# **Unless the Lord Builds the House**

**God's Design for the Family**

**by Gregg Bing**

*Published by*



**Grace Bible Church**

***Speaking the Truth in Love***

1450 Oak Hill Road  
Fort Worth, Texas 76112-3017  
(817) 451-0937

Copyright © 2008 by Grace Bible Church of Fort Worth, Inc. All rights reserved.

---

This book may not be sold or offered for sale without the written permission of Grace Bible Church of Fort Worth, Inc.

Portions of this book may be duplicated for use in an educational setting, however, the book, as a whole, may not be duplicated in any form without the written permission of Grace Bible Church of Fort Worth, Inc.

All Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* 1989 by Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc.

*“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...” (Psalm 127:1)*

**W**hile this expression might apply to anything that God’s people build, when you read the following verses of this Psalm (vs. 3-5), it seems clear that the word “house” refers to a household or a home, that is, a family. One of the greatest problems in our world today is that too many homes and families are not built by the Lord, that is, they are not built according to the principles which God has laid out in His Word. We can understand why this is true of unbelieving families, but it is sad to say the same problem exists in Christian homes as well. Statistics show that the divorce rate for Christian marriages is about the same as for unbelievers.

In his letter to the Colossian saints, the apostle Paul addresses the issue of God’s principles for godly homes and families. While he covers these issues in more detail in his letter to the Ephesians, we can learn a great deal from looking at the brief statements found in Colossians. Paul condenses God’s principles for home and family to the key responsibilities for each member of the family: the wife, the husband, children, and parents.

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” (Col. 3:18-21)*

## **MARRIAGE — Instituted by God**

Paul begins with marriage, the foundation of the home. Marriage was instituted by God in the very beginning. We read in Genesis 1 and 2 how God created all things in six days and rested from His work on the seventh. At the end of each day we read: “And God saw that it was good.” However, after God created the man on the sixth day, He declared something was “not good.”

*“And the LORD God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” (Gen. 2:18)*

God Himself declared that man needed a “helper,” someone comparable to him. As all of the animals that God had created were brought before Adam for him to name, none of them was found to be suitable or comparable to him. None of the animals could be the helper that Adam needed (Genesis 2:19-20). So God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, took one of his ribs, fashioned the woman from the rib, and then brought her to Adam. It reminds us of modern day wedding ceremonies where the bride’s father escorts her down the aisle and presents her to the groom. In this first wedding, God presented the bride to Adam.

When Adam first saw the woman, he knew that she was the one, the one who was comparable to him, and yet wonderfully different. Adam cried out, no doubt in great joy:

*“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.” (Gen. 2:23)*

This wonderful person was very special to Adam because she was part of him, “bone of my bones” and “flesh of my flesh.” What a beautiful first marriage! Not as formal as our modern day ceremonies, but filled with just as much joy and gladness for both Adam and Eve.

Following Adam’s exclamation, we find these words:

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” (Gen. 2:24-25)*

God’s statement that “a man shall leave his father and mother” indicates that the institution of marriage was for all mankind. These instructions clearly weren’t limited to Adam and Eve, seeing they had no earthly father and mother.

Genesis 2:24 sets forth God's description for what makes a good marriage: leaving father and mother, being joined as husband and wife, and becoming one flesh. When a man is to be married, he is to leave his father and mother. Before a man is married his most important relationship and his strongest bond is with his parents, but after he is married this is no longer the case. This does not mean that he breaks all ties with his parents, but his relationship with them must change. He can still have a loving and close relationship with his parents, but it is no longer the most important one in his life.

When a man marries, he is to be "joined to his wife." The word "joined" means to be glued or cemented together so strongly that, if you tried to separate the two, both would be damaged or broken. From the very word that God used here, it is clear that God intended marriage to be "till death do us part." God never intended for marriages to end in divorce. Jesus told the Pharisees, "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6).

When a man and woman are "joined" as husband and wife, they "become one flesh." While this does refer to the sexual union of husband and wife, it seems to indicate more. Marriage is to be an intimate relationship, not just physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as well. What a beautiful design by our Creator to meet the needs of both men and women. Most of us need this kind of intimacy with another human being. God, in His infinite wisdom, provided for this need from the very beginning when He instituted marriage.

If marriage is such a wonderful institution, why do so many marriages, including Christian marriages, end in divorce? Because marriage can only be successful and honoring to the Lord when both the husband and wife recognize and follow the guidelines that God laid down regarding their respective roles and responsibilities in the marriage relationship.

Having examined marriage, the foundation of the home, which God instituted "in the beginning," we turn our attention to specific members of the family and their primary responsibilities, beginning with wives.

## **WIVES — Submit to Your Own Husbands**

In Colossians 3, Paul begins by specifying the primary responsibility that the wife is to focus on in marriage.

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” (Col. 3:18)*

The word “submit” means “to place or arrange under,” to place one’s self in subjection to the authority of another. In the case of wives, to their own husbands. This does not teach that all women are to be in subjection to all men, or that the wife is to be subject to all men, but that each wife is to submit to her own husband. This is not a popular teaching today, and would not be considered “politically correct.” Many people think these ideas are archaic, hopelessly out of date. It is assumed that this teaching relegates women (wives) to a position inferior to that of men (husbands). While this might be the opinion of some people in this world, this was never God’s intention.

For instance, some are offended by God’s use of the word “helper” or “help meet” (KJV) in Genesis 2:18 to describe what the woman would be for Adam, but there is nothing in this word that indicates a subservient role for women (wives). In fact, God uses this same word numerous times in the Old Testament to describe Himself as a “help” for His people Israel (cf. Psalm 33:20, Psalm 115:10-11). The word “helper” is not the role of a servant but of one who provides help or assistance in areas where another has need. In other words, the wife, as a helper, provides what is needed to complete her husband.

Men and women are different, in spite of what some social and political forces today would have us believe. God created men and women this way, with pronounced differences physically, socially, emotionally, and, in some ways, even mentally. Because of their differences, most men and women need someone to help make them complete, so God instituted marriage to bring a husband and wife together to live as one.

Since men and women have different strengths and weaknesses, it makes perfect sense for God to give husbands and wives

different roles and responsibilities in the marriage relationship. Loving, successful marriages occur when both the husband and wife acknowledge their respective roles, as set down by God in His Word, and are obedient to God in fulfilling their unique responsibilities.

The wife's role is laid out by God in Genesis 3:16, after Adam and Eve sinned against God. God spoke these words to Eve:

*"... Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you."*

The position of authority in marriage was given by God to the husband. He was to "rule" or have dominion over the wife. He was not to be a dictator or a taskmaster, but was to have the responsibility of leadership in the home.

Paul compares the relationship of the wife to her husband with that of the church to Christ.

*"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." (Eph. 5:22-24)*

When a wife submits to her own husband, she is to do so "as to the Lord." His role as head of the family is a God-given role, so when the wife submits to her husband, she is, in effect, submitting to the Lord and to His will and purpose for her marriage and home.

The husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the Head of the church. This is what God declares to be His order and arrangement. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, in the same manner wives are to be subject to their own husbands "in everything." When a wife submits to her own husband, she demonstrates her reverence and respect for God (Eph. 5:21). In Colossians 3:18, Paul describes such submission as being "fitting

in the Lord.” The word “fitting” speaks of one’s due response or duty. The wife’s duty to her husband, and more importantly her duty to God, is to submit to her own husband.

Since the husband is the head, does this imply a lesser position for the wife? Not at all! Women and wives are very special and very valuable to God. The apostle Peter spoke of this in his first letter to the Jews of the dispersion.

*“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.” (1 Peter 3:1-5)*

Peter also stressed the importance of a wife being submissive to her own husband, even a husband who is not obedient to the Word. This may refer to an unbelieving husband or to a believing husband who is not being obedient to the Word in regard to his walk. Peter speaks of the impact a wife’s submission can have on such a disobedient husband. Her chaste (pure) conduct accompanied by her fear of God can be used of God to win her husband to the Lord.

Most women today, including many Christian women, put too much emphasis on their outward appearance: arranging their hair, adorning themselves with fine jewelry, or wearing fashionable clothes. While these things are not necessarily wrong in themselves, the Lord is more interested in “the hidden person of the heart.” Real beauty is that which is incorruptible; beauty that is found in a “gentle and quiet spirit.”

The word “gentle” is also translated “meek.” A meek spirit is one that maintains an attitude toward God which accepts His

dealings with us as good and therefore rests in Him and His strength. This meekness is seen in kind and gentle dealings with others, even those who treat us with malice or hostility. Meekness is the opposite of selfishness or self-assertiveness. The word “quiet” means one who is tranquil; one who does not cause disturbances, but seeks to be at peace with others (Rom. 12:18). Peter states that this type of gentle and quiet spirit is “very precious in the sight of God.” The word “precious” literally means “of great price,” thus implying something of great value; something worthy of great honor; something that is held to be very dear. Women (wives) who possess this type of beautiful spirit are of great value in God’s eyes.

Wives and mothers play a vital role in the Christian home. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul instructs Titus to teach things which are proper for sound doctrine. He is to instruct the older women to be “teachers of good things.” In particular, they are to teach the younger women the following:

*“That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” (Titus 2:4-5)*

Older women are to “admonish” the younger women. The word “admonish” means to instruct them to be sober minded, to keep themselves under control. The word also carries the idea of carrying out their duties to God; duties which center on their home and family. A wife’s duties begin with love; love toward her husband and toward her children. Wives are to be discreet (of sound mind), to be chaste (morally and ethically pure), to be homemakers. The word “homemaker” does not refer to a good housekeeper who always maintain an immaculate home, but to one who “keeps” or “guards” the home and family. The King James Version translates this word as “keepers at home.” In our society today, there are an increasing number of attacks against God’s view of home and family as set down in His Word. The wife’s role as “keeper” of the home is clearly an important responsibility. When she takes this responsibility seriously, does

that which is good, and is submissive to her husband as head of the family, her actions stand as a solid testimony “that the Word of God may not be blasphemed (spoken against).”

What about husbands? You might expect their prime responsibility to be: “husbands, rule well over your wives,” but this is not what God’s Word teaches.

## **HUSBANDS — Love Your Wives**

*“Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter toward them.” (Col. 3:19)*

The husband’s primary responsibility is to love his wife. The question is: What kind of love does God have in mind? There are four different Greek words for love: *eros*, *storge*, *phileo*, and *agape*.

*Eros* is the word for sensual or physical love. It describes having a passion for something, most often to satisfy one’s own desires. This is what the world often views as love. The word *eros* is not used in the New Testament.

*Storge* is the word for affection, especially between close family members, such as parents and children. This word is also not found in the New Testament.

*Phileo* is a more general word for affection which includes, but is not limited to, family members. It describes a tender affection for someone else. It is often used to speak of love between friends. This word is used in the New Testament in several different ways. Paul uses it in Titus 2:4 of a young woman’s love for her husband and children.

*Agape* is the highest form of love, unconditional love for another. It is not a result of passion or desire, but a willful choice on one’s part. Though used sparingly in secular Greek literature, the Holy Spirit raises the word “agape” to a whole new level in the New Testament Scriptures. Consider this meaningful passage from 1 John 4.

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”*

*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:7-11)*

Agape love originates with God for love is of God. No one can love in this way unless they are born of God and know God, because, in fact, God is love. Agape love is a giving love. God so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son for us (John 3:16). God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him, but God also sent Him to the cross, to be the propitiation for our sins. What an indescribable gift! (2 Cor. 9:15). Agape love is also unconditional. God did not sacrifice His Son for us because we loved Him. In fact, we did nothing deserving of God’s love. God gave His Son to die for us even while we were miserable, helpless sinners (Rom. 5:6-8). Which of these types of love are husbands to have for their wives? Certainly physical or sexual love (Gr. eros) is an important part of a marriage (Gen. 2:24). In addition, genuine affection (Gr. phileo) and real friendship is a vital part of the relationship between husband and wife. However, the type of love that really holds a marriage together is the willful choice to love your spouse unconditionally (Gr. agape). This is the type of love husbands are admonished to have for their wives.

### ***Love Your Wife As Christ Loved the Church***

Often, the best way to understand this type of love is to look at an example. Paul gives husbands the greatest example of all in Ephesians 5.

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church,*

*not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:25-27)*

Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? He gave Himself for it. The Lord Jesus loved us so much that He was willing to give His life for us. He humbly subjected Himself to the will of His Father (Phil. 2:5-8) and was delivered into the hands of wicked men (Luke 24:7) who abused Him, shamed Him, and then cruelly crucified Him on the cross of Calvary. Why would Christ be willing to endure such sufferings? He loved us and desired to have a close, personal relationship with us, but He knew that He must first sanctify and cleanse us from our sins. The only way this could happen was through His death on the cross for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Christ gave His life for our sins, that He might present us to Himself. Husbands are to have this type of love and care for their wives. Husbands cannot cleanse their wives from their sins; only Christ could do that. Husbands can and should love their wives unconditionally, being willing to give of themselves to provide for the needs of their wives, especially their spiritual needs.

### ***Love Your Wife as Your Own Body***

Christ loved the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). Just as Christ loved His body, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies.

*“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” (Eph. 5:28-29)*

“He who loves his wife loves himself.” To some this seems a strange statement, but it follows because when a man and wife are joined together in marriage, they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). The husband is to love and care for his wife as he does his own body, for she is truly part of him. This type of love and care is

demonstrated in two ways: nourishing and cherishing.

Husbands are to nourish their wives. The word “nourish” basically means to feed, however, it also carries the idea of supplying one’s needs. The husband is to supply the needs of his wife. While this may involve financially providing for her physical needs (food, clothing, shelter, etc.), she has other needs which are even more important. The husband is to nourish his wife mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as well. A husband is to be more than just a bread-winner; he is to be the spiritual head of the household. While the wife is still an individual with her own personal relationship with the Lord, the husband is to set an example and provide leadership for their home in the areas of prayer, Bible study, worship, and spiritual growth. He is to care for her needs as much as he does his own.

Husbands are also to cherish their wives. The word “cherish” means literally to keep warm. It is used in the Septuagint (Greek) version of Deuteronomy 22:6 to describe a mother bird covering and warming her young. To cherish is thus to lovingly care for and protect; to provide safety and security. The husband is to provide this warm, tender, protective care for his wife. She should feel secure in his love, not only from physical danger or harm, but, even more so, from spiritual danger to their family.

### ***Do Not Be Bitter Toward Your Wife***

In the last half of Colossians 3:19, Paul admonishes husbands not to be (or become) bitter toward their wives. The word “bitter” refers to the husband’s attitude toward his wife. While a husband might occasionally be irritated or even angry with his wife, he is not to become bitter toward her, to be left with a constant bitter taste in his mouth (or stomach) toward her. When a husband has this type of feeling toward his wife, he will usually deal harshly with her. The Apostle Peter, in his first letter, addresses the issue of a husband’s attitude toward his wife.

*“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your*

*prayers may not be hindered.” (1 Peter 3:7)*

Peter instructs husbands to dwell with their wives with understanding. The word “understanding” is from the Greek word “gnosis” which means knowledge. The use of this word stresses the importance of a husband seeking to know and understand his wife. Though husband and wife become one flesh in marriage, their relationship must grow and develop as they live together. It is interesting that in the Old Testament Scriptures, the word used to describe sexual intimacy between a husband and wife is the word “know” (cf. Gen. 4:1: “Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.”). The use of the word “know” implies that husband and wife share more than just physical intimacy. There is a mental, emotional, and spiritual intimacy that develops as well. A husband needs to make a real, concentrated effort to know and understand his wife’s needs in all these areas.

Peter also focuses on the importance of husbands giving honor to their wives. The word “honor” literally refers to the price or cost of something, that is, its value or worth. Husbands are to recognize the great value that is found in their wives. Proverbs 18:22 declares:

*“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD.”*

A godly wife is a great blessing from the Lord, therefore, a husband should value and honor her as such. Some argue that women are weaker than men, are subservient to men, and are thus less important to God. None of these are Scriptural ideas. Peter does indicate that women are the weaker vessels. While this may be true of women physically, this in no way diminishes the value of their role and importance to God. Peter speaks of wives as being heirs together (with their husbands) of the grace of life. The expression “heirs together” means that believing wives share equally with their believing husbands in the inheritance of the grace of life. A husband who does not recognize the value of his wife and honor her as God does, will find his own spiritual life and growth hindered.

Though the Scriptures plainly teach that the husband is the head of his wife, this is not a position of great power or privilege, as some mistakenly believe, but one of tremendous responsibility. The husband is to be the spiritual head of his family. He is to supply the needs of his family, providing protection and security for them, not just physically, but spiritually. The number one priority of the husband is to love his wife, unconditionally, just as Christ loved the church, just as a man loves his own body. This is what he is bound by God to do. This is his duty, certainly to his wife, but more importantly, this is his duty to God.

We now turn our attention from the marriage relationship to the relationship and responsibilities of:

## **PARENTS AND CHILDREN**

Whenever we see a moral and spiritual decline in society, one of the contributing factors to such apostasy is disobedience to parents. Paul lists this as one of the characteristics of the Gentile world prior to the call of Abram (Rom. 1:30). He also tells Timothy that during the last days of this present dispensation “perilous times will come;” times during which men will be “disobedient to parents” (2 Tim. 3:2).

Proverbs 30:12-14 describes a generation that is “pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness.” If we look back at verse 11 of this same passage, we find one of the contributing factors to such an evil generation.

*“There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother.” (Prov. 30:11)*

The family clearly has a tremendous influence on society as a whole. Children who grow up disobedient and disrespectful of their parents’ authority, will probably never develop respect for other authorities, whether school, church, government, or business. This is why Paul stresses the importance of homes and families being built on spiritual principles; homes where each family member understands and submits to his or her God given responsibilities.

## CHILDREN — Obey Your Parents

*“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.” (Col. 3:20)*

The primary responsibility God gives to children is to obey their parents. The word “obey” is literally “to hear under.” It means not only to hear with the ears, but to take heed to what is said and to do it. The same word is used to describe how unclean spirits obeyed Jesus (Mark 1:27), how the winds and sea obeyed Jesus’ command to be still (Matthew 8:27), and how slaves are to obey their masters according to the flesh (Eph. 6:5). In each of these cases, we find that obedience involves submission to authority, God-given authority. The unclean spirits obeyed Jesus because they knew who He was, “the Son of God.” The winds and sea obeyed Jesus because He is the Creator of all things. Slaves were to obey their masters because they had authority over them under Roman law.

Children are placed under the authority of their parents by the laws of society, but more importantly by God. The importance of this authority is seen in the fact that it is one of the ten commandments, the foundation of the laws given through Moses to God’s chosen people, Israel. The first four commandments spell out Israel’s duties to God, the last six their duties to one another. The first commandment in this second group is:

*“Honor your father and mother.” (Exo. 20:12)*

While this commandment does not specifically mention obedience, it does emphasize the importance of children recognizing and respecting the authority God has given to their parents.

Even the Lord Jesus, who grew up under the Mosaic law, recognized the authority given to His earthly “parents” including His mother, Mary, and Joseph, even though he was not Jesus’ biological father.

*“Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them ...” (Luke 2:51)*

## *Hear the Instruction*

One of the key aspects of obedience is “hearing.” Solomon was led of God to write proverbs to instruct his children in wise living. One of the things he stressed was:

*“My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains (necklaces) about your neck.” (Prov. 1:8-9)*

The instructions of a godly father and mother, when heard and heeded by an obedient child, will adorn the child’s life with grace and goodness. The same principle is true of believers, as children of God. We have a wonderful Father who has given us instructions in His Word. We are to be obedient to Him. The book of Hebrews describes the obedience of Abraham in this way:

*“By faith Abraham obeyed God when he was called to go out to the place he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” (Heb. 11:8)*

Abraham obeyed God “by faith.” He trusted God and “went out, not knowing where he was going.” How did Abraham have such faith? The answer is found in this familiar passage:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17)*

This emphasis upon *hearing* points out how important communication is in the parent-child relationship. Children need to learn to listen to their parents, to hear the instructions and the warnings they give, and then to take heed to them and do them. Parents need to make sure that they clearly communicate to their children what is required. Don’t just expect them to know and don’t hold them accountable when you have failed to make yourself understood.

## *Honor Your Father and Mother*

While hearing and doing are included in the idea of obedience, there is more. In Ephesians 6:1-2, Paul declares that children are to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right,” but he also quotes the sixth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother.” Obedience is primarily seen in the actions of the child, hearing and doing, but obedience also involves the child’s attitude. Children are to honor their father and mother. The word “honor” means literally “to fix a value or price on.” To honor is to see as being of great value, to esteem, to hold dear, and thus to respect. Children need to recognize how valuable their parents are, both to them and to God. They need to respect the position and authority God has given to their parents.

Paul points out that this commandment to “honor father and mother” was “the first commandment with promise.” What was the promise? The promise involved two aspects of their life: its quality (“that it may be well with you”) and its quantity (“that you may live long on the earth”). While we may not be able to claim this promise during this present dispensation of grace, particularly the promise of a long life, there is a principle found in this promise we can apply. Our family life affects all aspects of our life. A child who honors his father and mother and is obedient to them is much more likely to have a good life, a life that is blessed by God and can be used for His glory.

### *Well-Pleasing to the Lord.*

Why is it so important for children to obey their parents “in all things?” First, because “it is right” (Eph. 6:1); not necessarily right in men’s eyes, but certainly in God’s eyes. Psalm 19:8 says: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.” When a child obeys his or her parents, they are living right or righteously, which is what God’s grace teaches us to do (Titus 2:12).

Second, a child’s obedience to his or her parents is “well pleasing to the Lord;” it brings Him pleasure and causes Him to be filled with gladness or delight. This should be the desire of each of us as believers, to bring pleasure to God, to have Him be

pleased with our life and service.

Children are to obey their parents “in the Lord.” What this means is that when children obey their parents, they are actually obeying God. As they submit to their parents’ authority over their lives, they learn the importance of submitting themselves to the Lord and to His authority in their lives. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Cor. 6:19-20)*

### ***Why Do Children Disobey?***

As parents, we realize very quickly that obedience and submission do not come naturally to children. It is not in their nature. Proverbs 29:15 puts it this way: “A child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” Children are born with a sin nature. David acknowledged in his prayer of confession to God: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). The prophet Jeremiah was led of God to write: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). The world would have us believe that people are basically good by nature, but this is clearly not what the Bible teaches. When we look at a little baby or a young child, we often speak of how sweet and innocent they are, but we need to recognize that children are born with a sin nature; a nature that makes them self-centered. Even babies or young children are primarily focused on satisfying their own needs or wants, something they can often get by crying. As they grow, they will not naturally develop the trait of obedience; they must be taught.

Another factor that hinders children from being obedient to their parents is the environment in which they must live—an environment Paul referred to as “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). John, in writing to the Jews of his day, warned of the danger of becoming enamored with the things of this world.

*“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15-17)*

The messages our children get from the world, be it from television, movies, books, schools, or their peers, do not encourage them to be submissive to God or obedient to their parents. We need to be aware of, and make them aware of, the dangerous influences that are part of this evil world system they live in. We need to warn them that Satan is presently the prince (ruler) of this world. We cannot isolate our children from the world, but we need to do all we can to ensure they do not become “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2).

As parents, we need to understand that our children are just that: children. They lack the maturity, wisdom, and discernment of adults. Proverbs 22:15 says: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” The word “foolishness” simply means they lack fully developed wisdom. They often think, speak, and act in foolish ways. Paul spoke of his own time of childhood in 1 Corinthians 13.

*“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” (1 Cor. 13:11)*

We must recognize that our children need to grow, develop, and mature in many different areas. Even the Lord Jesus, as He grew up, “... increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

All of these factors contribute to a child’s tendency to disobey their parents. Obedience doesn’t come naturally. Children need to be instructed, to be trained, to be disciplined.

We now turn our attention to the responsibilities God has given to parents.

## God's Instructions for — FATHERS

*“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” (Col. 3:21)*

The first thing we notice about this verse is that God does not address this directive to parents but specifically to fathers. Why is this the case? Mothers obviously play a vital role in the raising of their children. In Titus 2:4-5, we read how the older women in the church are to teach the younger women.

*“That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”*

Clearly the focus of young wives and mothers is to be on their homes and families. They are taught to love their husbands, to love their children, and to be homemakers. This word “homemakers” is not a description of one who is merely a housekeeper or cleaning woman. The King James Version translates this word as “keepers at home,” an expression which speaks of one who keeps, watches, or guards the home. This is what young wives and mothers are to be: the guardians of their homes. Although society often downplays this role for women, in God's eyes it is a tremendous work that is of great value to the family, to society, and to God Himself.

Why then are the instructions of Colossians 3:21 (as well as those of Ephesians 6:4) specifically addressed to fathers? In the same way that the husband is the head of the wife in the marriage relationship, the father is the spiritual head of his household. He is responsible for providing spiritual leadership for his wife and his children. While both parents can and should be involved in raising and providing spiritual training for their children, it is the father's responsibility to see that this work gets done.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he gives the same instruction to fathers as he gives in Colossians 3:21, but he adds some responsibilities.

*“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4)*

The negative side of a father’s responsibility is: “do not provoke your children to wrath.” On the positive side, a father is instructed: “bring them up in the training (nurture) and admonition of the Lord.” We will examine the positive side first.

### ***Bring Your Children Up***

Fathers are directed to “bring them up,” an expression which means to raise or to rear, but particularly to nourish or to feed. In general it speaks of supporting them, providing for their needs. This same word is used in Ephesians 5:29 to describe how a man nourishes his own body and how Christ nourishes the church, which is His body. Oftentimes we hear the husband and father described as the provider for the home. Usually this is taken to mean the breadwinner, the one who provides for the physical needs of his home and family, things such as food, shelter, clothing, etc. There is no question that the Bible strongly encourages men to provide for their own families.

*“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Thess. 5:8)*

While many men are conscientious in providing for their family’s physical needs, there are too many who neglect an even more important area of their family’s needs—their spiritual needs. The spiritual and moral training of children is not the responsibility of the community in which they live; it is not the responsibility of the government (federal, state, or local); it is not the responsibility of the schools; it is not even the responsibility of the local church. The spiritual and moral training of children is the responsibility of parents, in particular the father! Husbands and fathers are charged by God with providing spiritual leadership for their wives and children in their worship of the Lord, their study of

God's Word, their walk with the Lord, and their service and work for the Lord. This is what it means to bring them up.

There are two key aspects to how fathers are to "bring up" their children: training and admonition. Each of these is qualified by the expression "of the Lord." The training and admonition in view here centers around the Lord and His Word; it is spiritual in nature.

### *Training of the Lord*

The word "training" ("nurture" in the KJV) is from a Greek word which means child training or instruction. It involves all aspects of bringing a child to spiritual maturity: education and instruction, but also discipline, correction, and chastening.

Most parents today emphasize their children's education. They want them to do well in school; to learn to read, to write, to do math, to appreciate art and history. All of these things are important, to a degree, but training is needed in areas other than these school subjects if a child is to really grow and mature. The "training" we are to give our children is to be "of the Lord." This refers to training in the knowledge of the Lord, knowledge which can only be found in God's Word. Are we as concerned with our children's knowledge of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15-17) as we are their ability to do long division? Do we spend as much time teaching them the gospel of God's grace (Rom. 1:16) as we do the history of the United States? Are we as worried about their godly character (Titus 2:11-14) as we are about the characters in a so-called classic work of literature? The writer of Proverbs, in giving wise instruction to his children, stressed the importance of building the household or family upon such spiritual wisdom, knowledge, and understanding:

*"Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches." (Prov. 24:3-4)*

Fathers, it is your responsibility to see that your children are trained in the things of the Lord and His Word!

An important part of this spiritual training involves discipline. When people see this word “discipline,” they usually think only of punishment. Though punishment is sometimes involved, the goal of discipline is training; it includes chastening and correction so that a child can learn from the experience. The need for discipline in children is pointed out in several passages in the book of Proverbs. Consider these two examples:

*“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” (Pro. 22:15)*

*“The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” (Pro. 29:15)*

While the use of the term “rod” may bring to mind physical punishment, the focus is on correcting and instructing the child, imparting wisdom and thus driving away the foolishness that is in him (or her) by nature. A child that is simply left to himself, with no rebuke or correction, will bring shame upon himself and his family.

Many these days believe that discipline is a form of cruelty, even child abuse. Certainly physical punishment (spanking, for example) can become abusive if misused or taken too far, however, a parent who truly loves their children will be careful to discipline them when it is needed, just as the Lord disciplines us as His children.

*“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.” (Pro. 3:11-12)*

*“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” (Pro. 13:24)*

While training is a vital part of bringing up children, there is another aspect to consider as well: the admonition of the Lord.

## *Admonition of the Lord*

The word “admonition” literally means to set or place in the mind. It also involves training, but primarily through words, by encouraging, reminding, or warning. We see the word used in 1 Corinthians 10 where Paul, in verse 1-10, describes Israel’s sins against God in the wilderness and God’s subsequent judgments upon His chosen people. Paul then tells us:

*“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” (1 Cor. 10:11)*

These things happened to the people of Israel and serve as examples to us. They were written for our “admonition;” to teach us, to remind us, to warn us of the consequences of such sin against God.

Parents are usually diligent in teaching, warning and reminding their children about the dangers in the world around them: physical dangers such as touching a hot stove or running in front of a moving car, as well as the dangers of alcohol, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. However, most parents, including some Christian parents, give little thought about teaching, warning, and reminding their children of the spiritual dangers they will face throughout their lives. Parents, particularly fathers, need to admonish their children about Satan and his deceitful methods (Eph. 6:10-12), about the evils of the world system in which they live (1 John 2:15-17), about the danger of conforming to the world (Rom. 12:1-2), about the false teaching they will hear (1 Tim. 6:3-5), about the importance of guarding their minds and hearts (Phil. 4:4-9).

These are dangers which affect not only our children’s lives here on earth, but their lives for all eternity. Paul wrote the Colossians:

*“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” (Col. 1:28)*

If children are to grow and mature spiritually, it is vital that their parents preach (or proclaim) the Lord Jesus Christ to them; not a religious system or denomination with its creeds and traditions, but a wonderful and glorious Savior and Head! Children need to be warned and taught in all wisdom if they are to become spiritually mature in Christ Jesus. Parents, and fathers especially, this is your responsibility!

### *Effective Training*

What is the most effective way for parents to train and admonish their children? The answer is two-fold. To begin with, children must simply be told these things. The book of Deuteronomy contains God's commandments to the nation of Israel as they prepared to enter the promised land. God reminded them of the importance of keeping His words in their own hearts and diligently teaching them to their children.

*“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deut. 6:6-7)*

Parents do not need to establish a classroom or have formal lesson plans in order to teach their children. They just need to talk about the Lord as a normal part of their everyday life; “When you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” All of these times are what people today like to call “teachable moments.”

Yet, there is more to teaching our children than just telling them about the Lord. Parents also need to show their children the difference the Lord can make in a life. Fathers and mothers need to be examples, spiritual role models for their children.

Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, spoke of the impact his manner of life had upon his ministry of the Word among them. It is interesting that he compares his conduct to that of a loving mother and a godly father.

*“But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess. 2:7-12)*

It was not only Paul’s words and teaching, but also his gentleness in dealing with them, his labor and toil on their behalf, his devout, just, and blameless behavior among them, and his obvious concern for their welfare as he comforted, encouraged, and charged them to walk worthy of the Lord.

The importance of both telling and showing a child the things of the Lord can be seen in the life of the young man, Timothy. Timothy grew up in a home where he was taught the Word of God.

*“And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 3:15)*

But Timothy was also influenced by the lives of two women of genuine faith in the Lord: his mother and grandmother.

*“When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.” (2 Tim. 1:5)*

## *Do Not Provoke Your Children*

Finally, we take note of the special caution given to fathers in Colossians 3:21:

*“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”*

The word “provoke” means to stir up, to excite, or to stimulate. It is used in a good sense in 2 Corinthians 9:2, where Paul speaks of the Corinthians’ zeal provoking or stirring up others to minister to the needs of the saints. However, here in Colossians 3:21, the word is used in a negative sense of a father provoking a child to strife or contention, even anger. The same basic idea is found in Ephesians 6:4:

*“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”*

In this verse the word “provoke” is a different word which speaks specifically of rousing a child to wrath or excessive anger, even to the point of irritation or exasperation. This does not mean that a child will never become angry with his parents. Children have a sin nature which, in itself, can lead them to become angry, even when they are not provoked. God’s command to fathers in these two verses is that they not stir up these types of negative feelings in their children.

Fathers need to be particularly careful in the area of discipline. When a child is corrected or punished for something unfairly or inconsistently, this can generate strife between the child and his parents, even feelings of anger and frustration. If this situation occurs on a regular basis the child can reach a point where he becomes discouraged (Col. 3:21). The word “discouraged” literally means to lose heart or become disheartened. In a sense, the child’s spirit can be broken, affecting his feelings, his passions, even his courage. Children can become discouraged to the point they give up trying to please their parents.

Fathers need to let their “moderation be known unto all men,” (Phil. 4:5, KJV) in particular to their children. The word “moderation” is often translated “gentleness” or “mildness,” but it also carries the meaning of fairness or reasonableness. It is important that fathers deal gently with their children, and that they treat them fairly and reasonably, especially in the area of discipline.

Fathers should deal with their children in a controlled manner. To do so, fathers must, themselves, be controlled by the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 5:18). When this is the case, they will be filled with the fruit of the Spirit:

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23)*

Let’s consider how important each of these characteristics is in the way a father deals with his children.

**Love:** Fathers are to love their children unconditionally, with the same giving, caring love that God shows toward us. This type of love should govern and motivate a father in all his dealings with his children. Children need to feel this love from their parents because, when they experience it, they respond to it.

**Joy:** The word “joy” does not have the same meaning as the word “happiness,” at least not in the Scriptures. Everyone experiences happiness at times, but only those who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior can have true joy. Fathers should show forth the joy of the Lord that is in their hearts, in all that they do. The home should be a place where this wonderful joy is seen, experienced, and appreciated.

**Peace:** The word “peace” is a word that speaks of relationship. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God (or literally “peace toward God”) (Rom. 5:1). We are brought into a wonderful, close relationship with our heavenly Father. Being at peace with God and having the peace of God in their

hearts, fathers should seek to maintain peace in their homes, the type of peace which builds solid relationships between all family members.

**Longsuffering:** Children can sometimes be exasperating and try the patience of their parents. Fathers must remember that their children are not adults; they are children and are therefore immature in many areas. Fathers must be longsuffering in dealing with their children, being willing to put up with the immature behavior and patiently correcting and training them so they may grow and mature in the Lord.

**Kindness:** The word “kindness” is somewhat difficult to define, although we know it when we experience it from others. Kindness basically means doing what is beneficial or useful for someone else. Fathers should be kind to their children, seeking that which will benefit their children’s growth and development, especially in spiritual matters. Fathers need to treat their children as Paul describes in Ephesians 4:32: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

**Goodness:** The Bible speaks of the goodness of God. God desires good things for His children (Jer. 29:11), therefore He gives good gifts to them to accomplish His purpose in their lives. The nature of God’s gifts is described in James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” Fathers should seek to model their heavenly Father in their dealings with their own children, consistently desiring what is best for them. Children can learn about the goodness of God if their parents manifest this goodness in the home.

**Faithfulness:** Fathers should be faithful before their children. They need to demonstrate their faith in God and their faithfulness toward God, but they also need to be faithful toward their children. Fathers should be men of integrity, men who

are true to their word. The writer of Proverbs gave this wise counsel: “The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him” (Prov. 20:7).

**Gentleness:** Fathers need to exhibit the trait of gentleness or meekness. The word “meekness” speaks of an attitude of humility, an acceptance of God’s dealings with us as always being good. When a person has this type of attitude toward God, it will be demonstrated in a life that deals with others in gentleness. Fathers who are filled with the fruit of the Spirit will have just such an attitude and will be gentle and mild in the handling of their children.

**Self-Control:** Finally, fathers must exhibit self-control, meaning they keep their passions under control, particularly their anger. This is especially important when admonishing or disciplining their children. Fathers must remember that harsh and unfair treatment of their children can cause great damage. This includes harsh words spoken in anger. James, chapter 3, speaks of the importance of controlling our tongues (our speech). Though the tongue is a small member in the body, it can inflict great harm, especially on a young and impressionable child.

## **WISDOM to Build a Family**

If a husband or father is to build a godly home and family and provide solid spiritual leadership, that home must be founded upon wisdom.

*“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” (Prov 24:3-4)*

This type of wisdom is not the wisdom of this world; it is the wisdom that comes from God.

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him*

*show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:13-18)*

This wisdom is not found in men’s philosophies or traditions. It is not found in “how-to” books about marriage or parenting. It is only found in the Word of God. Husbands who truly want to have successful marriages and fathers who desire to train and raise godly children, must spend time on a regular basis in God’s Word; it is there they will find the wisdom to build and establish their homes as God intended.