

CROSSING THE BORDER
An Expository Study of Colossians

by GUY H. KING

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CHAPTER EIGHT
HIS IDEAL HOME EXHIBITION 3:15-4:1

AMONG the greatest achievements of Christianity is the Christian Home, which fact has so often created a deep impression on the mission field.

It is important to note how great a stress the New Testament places on it. To take two instances. When Legion had been so gloriously transformed by the Lord JESUS, he wanted straightaway to go overseas for Him, to bear witness to His gracious power to heal and save; but the Master had other plans for him, "**Go home . . . and tell them,**" Mark 5:19; "**and shew . . .**" Luke 8:39.

Home was to be his first mission field, as it is for all Christians. How strikingly successful this man was in his home ministry is seen in the fact that these people who had turned JESUS away, when He returned, "**gladly received Him, for they were all waiting for Him,**" Luke 8:40.

Yes, if you have never yet done it, "**tell**" the news, and "**shew**" the new man at home. Extend the borders of your testimony afterwards; but, home first.

One further instance of the same Christian principle, and order of things. Says Paul, "**Learn first to shew piety at home,**" I Timothy 5:4.

Here is one of the first lessons in the Primary School of the Christian life. We shall, of course, enlarge our circle of Christian behaviour as time goes on, and as opportunity occurs - but, home first.

Alas, we have heard of some Christians who seem to have thought of their home as the place wherein there is no need to display the true spirit of CHRIST - it is often the most difficult place in which to do it, but let us ever bear in mind this "**first**" rule of the faith. And we will not forget that showing piety does not mean talking about religion, but living it. So we come to look at Paul's Ideal Home Exhibition.

THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

Husband and wife, 18-19. This relationship is, of course, fundamental to the well-being of the home. Not a few children have developed disastrously simply because of the sad relationship existing between these two. Children notice far more than parents sometimes realise. How truly tragic it is when those who should be the home-makers become the home-breakers.

GOD counts the family life as so deeply important, which, we may be sure, is why He "**setteth**

the solitary in families," Psalm 68:6.

(1) Wives are given this guiding word, "**submit**," which does not imply a kind of abject slavery to the Great Man. Indeed, in the parallel passage in Ephesians, in the verse immediately before this exhortation to the ladies, the word occurs also in a wider application, "**submitting yourselves one to another**," Ephesians 5:21-2.

I think we shall not go far wrong if we give to the expression the connotation of "mutual service". Each is to serve the highest interest of the other; and the women are reminded that, subject only to the overlordship of the Lord Himself, this is their proper attitude - "**as it is fit in the Lord**".

In His concern for the welfare of the man, is it not a rather beautiful conception and name that GOD has for his wife - "**I will make him an helpmeet for him**," Genesis 2:18? Happy the home when the wife "fits" into that Divine pattern.

(2) Husbands, too, are given a guiding word, "**love**," which is also, of course, to be mutual. Perhaps, in the heathen atmosphere of Colossae, in which these church members were bred, and were only, lately emerged, men all too often regarded their wives as little more than chattels, and that is why Paul felt it necessary to emphasize, even to Christians, that love was to be the rule of the relationship, not harshness - accommodating, not demanding. Is anything more delightful than the obvious, mutual love of a married couple - and the sight of an old Darby and Joan who are quite evidently sweethearts still?

Parent and Child, 20-21. What a joy to have little people of your own; ay, and what a responsibility!

I often think, when a child is given to mother and father, of GOD saying to them, "**Take this child, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages**," Exodus 2:9. What wages of happiness, and pride, and love are yours if you find them growing up for GOD!

(1) Children are given a guiding word, "**obey**," and that "**in all things**". The only restriction is, as in the Ephesian passage, "**in the Lord**" - one implication being that if the parent demanded something that would be wrong in the Lord's sight, the child is required to follow the higher loyalty. When Oliver Twist was being trained by old Fagin to pick pockets, he could have invoked a higher loyalty, and obeyed, rather, the Lord, who said, "**Thou shalt not steal**".

The word for children in our passage is not that for the "*babes*" of I Peter 2:2, nor that for the "*young children*" of Mark 10:13, but a word implying one grown to years that could discern the clash of loyalties. But, with this one exception, he is still to obey his parents in all things.

It is a delightful picture that we have of the twelve-year-old boy JESUS accompanying His mother and Joseph back from Jerusalem to the home at Nazareth, where He "**was subject unto them**," Luke 2:51.

One thinks, too, of the lovely upbringing of Tiny Tim, who "**from a child [babe] hast known the Holy Scriptures**," 2 Timothy 3:15 - reared on "**the sincere [Gk. unadulterated] milk of the**

Word, I Peter 2:2; and taught the faith by mother and grannie, 2 Timothy 1:5. What a grand household is here envisaged.

Alas, that "**disobedient to parents,**" 2 Timothy 3:2, is an all-too common feature of this present age. By the way, may I be so bold as to suggest that we are never too old to disregard the wishes of our parents - the relationship will no longer be the childlike "**obey,**" but the "**honour thy father and thy mother,**" Exodus 20:12, endorsed by our Lord who originally gave it on Sinai, Luke 18:20.

It is greatly distressing to observe the callous and grudging way in which some - yes, even some Christians - treat their obligation to care for the old folk, who in bygone years so lovingly cared for them. Shame on such unchristian behaviour!

(2) Fathers also have a guiding word here "**provoke not**". It is so easy to "**discourage**" the children by constant nagging at them, or by the use of the unfair method of heavy sarcasm, and what not.

The reader will recall the little boy who said his name was "Don't". On it being supposed that he hadn't understood the question, he Insisted, and explained, "Wherever I am, and whatever I'm doing, it's always, Don't, Don't, Don't. I'm right sick of it. That's my name, Don't". Poor little creature!

And how much light is thrown on the life in the home when a mother sent her daughter upstairs with the instructions, "Go and see what Johnny is doing, and tell him not to". Talk about provoking children to anger! In some homes it is not surprising that the children are irritated and resentful. How different it can be when the child's parents seek, carefully and prayerfully, to "**bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,**" Ephesians 6:4.

Master and Servant, 3:22-4:1. This latter word is a very mild and inadequate rendering of the original Greek, which indicates that the man was a slave - a bond-slave: the absolute property of the man who had bought him. It is the same word as Paul used so often when he described himself as he delighted to do - as the "**servant [bond-slave] of Jesus Christ,**" Romans 1:1.

(1) Servants are given much sound advice here. Look at some of the phrases employed.

(a) "**Not with eye service**": a homely illustration will make that clear.

When asked how she knew she had become a Christian, a servant-maid said, "Because I sweep under the mats now". An excellent test! Some people's service is rendered in the spirit that "what the eye doesn't see, the heart won't grieve over".

(b) "**Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men.**" This is not spiritual work, but the ordinary work required in the home, or on the estate, of the slave owner. If the Lord were his earthly Owner, he wouldn't be slack about it. Let this Christian slave, then, do his work for his worldly master as if he were doing it for the Heavenly Master.

Brother Lawrence could pursue "*The Practice of the Presence of GOD*" in his monastery

kitchen. Do you remember what is said about Joseph? "**The Lord was with Joseph. . . and his master saw that the Lord was with him,**" Genesis 39:2-3. I suppose there was a fidelity about the way he did his work that impressed Potiphar. May we all do our ordinary daily work in a like spirit.

(c) "**Ye serve the Lord Christ**". Samuel Chadwick used to say that he wrote his letters as if he were writing to the Lord, and so was careful that there should be no blots or mistake. What was that which one of our poets said about, "Who sweeps a room for the Lord's sake, makes that and the action fine"?

I don't think I have got that right, but that was the sentiment. Mrs. C. F. Alexander has long taught our children to sing, "And still do all for JESUS' sake".

A young assistant was minding the shop while the boss was out at lunch when a commercial traveller entered, and presently suggested some shady transaction. On seeing that the young fellow demurred, he said, "It's all right; after all, the master's not in". To which the youngster, with uppointing finger, replied, "My Master is always in". That's it; let us pursue our earthly occupation as ever under HIS eye.

(2) Masters, too, have their duties, toward their employees, to treat them justly and fairly. Is it not strange that this verse has got into the fourth chapter when it so obviously belongs to the third? Shall we dare to call it an archbishop's decision? The fact is that it was not until the 13th century A.D. that the Bible was divided up into chapters. It was then done by Archbishop Stephen Langton (who, by the way, also supervised King John's signing of the Magna Charta - so we owe him a great debt), but His Grace does seem to have slipped up here. Incidentally, the verse divisions waited another 300 years, and were eventually undertaken by a printer, Robert Stephens, not immaculately. But who are we to criticise such meticulous and immense labours, that have proved of such enormous assistance to us in our study of the Word. Well now, to return. The masters are ever to bear in mind that they "**also have a Master in heaven,**" who, without "**respect of persons,**" oversees them and their workmen alike-watching the way the man does his work, and the way the master treats him. Both are "under the Great Taskmaster's eye".

Here, then, are the Divine directions that will make for the Ideal Home, in which all the members of the household co-operate toward this desirable end. It will now be quite natural to turn our particular attention to a consideration of -:

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE

Humanly speaking, indeed, Scripturally speaking, "**the husband is the head,**" Ephesians 5:23, and where this order is duly observed it makes for the well-being of the family life. However, it sometimes happens that the wife usurps the man's rightful position and authority, and is patently and often aggressively in command. Except in unusual circumstances, that is not good. No reversal of GOD's appointed order, in any sphere, is good.

The inspired apostle bases this precedence upon the fact that "**Adam was first formed, then Eve,**" I Timothy 2:13. Let him remain "**first**" in the house. Occasionally it is found that an old servant rules the roast; and, would you believe it, it has been known for a spoilt and pampered

child to be the hub and pivot of the home life!

Note that, in our present passage, "**the Lord**" is mentioned by that name no less than seven times. The absolute lordship is His by blood-bought right-over "**mind and mouth and members,**" as the late Taylor Smith used to say over heart and hands and homes; over everything, A university undergraduate had learned well who wrote on the flyleaf of his Bible this couplet -

"If you do not crown Him Lord of all
You do not really crown Him Lord at all."

A life that is lived by this rule is one that knows the reality of Full Salvation, Do you recall that printed card which used often to be found hanging in the entrance hall of a home -

"CHRIST is the Head of this house,
The unseen Guest at every meal,
The silent Listener to every conversation."

It is in essence the same as the challenging testimony of Joshua in his farewell address to the people whom he led into Canaan - "**Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . as for me and my house, we Will serve the Lord**", Joshua 24:15. It reminds me of one of the loveliest noises ever heard, "**It was noised that He was in the house**" Mark 2:1 - and, attracted by that noise, how many came and were blessed, Ay, blessed indeed, and happy the domicile if He be the Head. We turn then to discover for ourselves -:

THE SECRETS OF THE HOME

The Peace - "**Let the peace of GOD rule in your hearts.**"

It is obviously GOD's plan that this quality should flourish in companies as well as in individuals - "**in one body**" of people, whether, as here, in the body of the family, or in the body of the fellowship, the church. How saddened Paul was concerning the two ladles at loggerheads in the Philippian church - "**I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord**" Philippians 4:2.

Such a situation has before now sapped the energy of a church community, and stopped its blessing. And who can measure the loss and sadness when members of the same home are scarcely on speaking terms. How "**thankful**" we should be when a peaceful spirit prevails.

Look for a moment at that word "**rule**". Its significance really is "*arbitrate*". John Milton calls conscience "the umpire of the soul"; but here, in "**the peace of God**", is an Infallible referee for the spirit. Does that line of conduct disturb our peace?

- That thing I want to do,
- that place I want to visit,
- that letter I want to write that circle I want to join

Does it becloud the sun of His peace? If it does, Don't!

It is a first-rate test for a first-rate Christian. It is grand to have "**the peace of God**" in our hearts; it is surpassing grand to have "**the God of peace**" there, in full control - of circumstances, and of conduct, Philippians 4:7, 9.

The Word, 16 - "**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly**".

I should think the idea here is that of a rich man coming to live in a house who, by reason of the financial resources at his command, is in a position to change completely the appearance and appointments of the place, while the previous occupant, being poor, was able to do very little toward the proper upkeep of the house. Has "**the word of Christ**" but a poor place in our hearts, or are we rejoicing in its riches?

The point here, however, is not merely the heart, but also the home itself. Is the Word the test and the talisman of the dwelling? If so, two things especially are likely to ensue.

(a) "**Wisdom**" - in the family conduct, plans, and relationships.

(b) "**Singing**" - for this is a happy home, when the Word is the yard-stick of all behaviour.

"**Singing with grace**" doesn't mean with gracefulness, or tunefulness, since not all of us can manage that, some even being tone deaf. The Greek has a definite article here, "**the**" grace, the grace of GOD "**singing with [the] grace in your hearts**"; this, if we are Christians, we can all manage, even with gusto. "**To the Lord**" - if nobody else enjoys your solo, GOD will, who made the crows as well as the nightingales.

That was a godly thing which, at one time, became almost a Sabbath evening institution, when the family gathered round the piano, and made the walls ring with their "**psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs**". With the Word in residence as the Rich One, the melody of heart and home is assured.

Let us, then, not merely read, but study, and ponder, and practise the Scriptures, that we may not simply have a poor knowledge thereof, but become increasingly possessed of its abounding wealth.

The Name, 17 - "**Do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus**".

That little word "**all**" is large in content - *multum in parvo*, as the Latins say. The verse also offers the bigger word, "**whatsoever**" - an india rubber word, that can be stretched to include everything that life demands of us: the hard things, the humdrum things, the happy things, the homely things, the holy things - "**all**," "**whatsoever**".

Herein "**the Name**" is to be our guiding star.

(a) Our reason is in the Name - we "**do**," because He did in the home at Nazareth.

(b) Our example is in the Name - who left us "**an example that ye should follow His steps**," I Peter 2:21.

(c) Our guidance is in the Name - as was said at the homely wedding scene, "**whatsoever He saith unto you, do it**," John 2:5.

(d) Our motive is in the Name - for "**the love of Christ constraineth us,**" II Corinthians 5:14.

When all is said and done, the Name just means Him.

These, then, are three great secrets why this that Paul envisages is no ordinary home, but the Ideal Home, exhibited here for our pleasure, and our pattern.

"Care and doubting, gloom and sorrow,
Fear and shame are mine no more;
Faith knows naught of dark tomorrow,
For my Saviour goes before:
Full salvation!
Full and free for evermore!"

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~ end of chapter 8 ~

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