

The Sunday after Christmas is usually marked as family Sunday. We are called to reflect on relationships within the family, husbands and wives, children and parents, fathers and children. In the creation act we notice that God had created male and female in his own image and therefore one has to recognize that men and women are equal in God's sight. In the letter to Colossians Paul address the whole community and tells them to consider their relationships with one another.

First and foremost he calls them as God's chosen people, Holy and dearly loved. Because they were a chosen people that privilege also brought along with it certain responsibilities. They were to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Compassion is something that comes out of our innermost being and moves us to action when we see someone else suffering. If we have this quality then we would understand each others pains. Secondly, he talks about having kindness which is an act of providing something beneficial to another person. This is to be followed by humility or a humble attitude mixed with gentleness in contrast with being harsh with one another. Finally he talks about patience, a word which describes emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune without complaint or irritation.

Paul then calls for bearing with one another and forgiving one another. Forgiveness is the essence of any long term relationship and Paul reminds us that we too are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us. Above all Paul asks them to put on love which binds families together in unity. All this may be easier said than done. So how is Paul suggesting that we practice this? He suggests that the message of Christ should dwell richly within us as we teach and admonish one another. So, the key point that he is making is that God's word should dwell in us richly. Families need to read God's word together so that God will speak to us and direct our paths. The word of God is like a double edged sword and as we meditate on it, it will penetrate between bone and marrow and reveal areas in our lives which are sinful and which we ourselves may not be aware of. He also encourages the community to sing psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit singing to God with gratitude in our hearts. By this he means that we are to be constantly in communion with God through prayer. Praying together as a family will help the family to be bound together in God's love and walk according to his word. Paul also exhorts the people of God that whatever they did in word or deed they should do it all in the name of Jesus giving thanks to God our Father through him. Within the family an attitude of gratitude is very important. As a family we are to give thanks to God for everything that happens to us. We should have a cheerful spirit rather than one of complaining about everything.

Paul than talks about relationship between husbands and wives, says, 'Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.' To submit literally means to "place under" or to "subject oneself" or to "submit voluntarily." What does this term mean? Women tend to disagree with submitting. However the second part of the verse says, "as is fitting in the Lord." In other words Paul is saying that just as Christ submitted to God, so also members of the congregation are to submit to one another including husbands and wives. The exhortation to submit is balanced with instruction to the husbands to love their wives and not to be harsh with them. The love that is talked about is the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross.

The next set of relationships is about children and parents. Paul says children are to obey their parents in everything for it pleases the Lord. One of the biggest issues that parents have is about the obedience of their children. Parents are to show love to their children so that they too will respond in obedience out of love.

Finally a word of caution to fathers not to exasperate children so that they become discouraged. Fathers are called to be encouragers of their children rather than frustrating them. All this is possible only with the love of Christ. May God truly fill us with his love and help us to be a family that lives out its life for Christ.