**House Rules**

***18****Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.****19****Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.****20****Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.****21****Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.****22****Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.****23****Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,****24****knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.****25****For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Colossians 3:18-4:1, ESV)*

 In a Christian home, it is the awareness of God’s Presence that shapes the interpersonal relationships between each family member. Greetings in the Lord to all of you, as we talk today about the rules of a Christian household according to the Apostle Paul. The passage is recorded immediately after he had just talked about the personal faith-life of each believer. He had just said that a Christian must “take off” the old and “put on” the new (referring to putting on Christ as a lifestyle). However, a believer’s life is not to be a personal academic exercise. Rather, the interpersonal relationships within a family unit are equally important. Therefore, we are going to talk today about the latter, which are the reflections of each family member’s personal faith convictions. Again, being aware of God’s Presence shapes the interpersonal relationships between the family members of a Christian household. Let’s go a little deeper:

 A Christian family is different in its internal interpersonal relationships than a non-Christian one. Having said that, it is important to note that while knowing God personally and obeying Him on a personal level is good, if faith remains purely a personal endeavor, the true reality of Christian life doesn’t appear in society. The Apostle is reminding his hearers that the Christian home is inherently different than the standard pagan Roman household. In the latter pagan homes, the father had absolute authority over everyone, whether it be the wife, the children, the servants or slaves. If he wanted to punish severely, or to have someone whipped, or even executed because of a serious reason, he easily could have done so. The Christian home, however, needed to function completely differently: wives were to be submitted to their husbands, but not like slaves, but rather as ones that were united to the Lord – submitted in love, in respect, and in devotion. They were not to submit with upsetness, anger, bitterness or hatred; but willingly, and trusting the power of God, that the husband will follow the Lord’s will. Husbands were to love their wives as Jesus loved them and everyone else and sacrificed His life for all. Husbands were to have sacrificial love for their wives – in no way should they allow the devil to put any bitterness or undue anger within them. The children should obey their parents, not out of fear, but out of love and trust, because such obedience is pleasing to the Lord. Servants or slaves should serve their masters as if they were serving Jesus himself, while the masters themselves were to be compassionate and fair with them. In other words, the Christian household was to have a different environment because of its focus on living for the Lord Jesus than the pagan home where the fear and awareness of the Lord was absent.

 There were once two boats who were sailing down the Mississippi River toward New Orleans. As they were travelling, one boat’s sailors began to make negative comments about the other boat’s slow pace. The other boat answered back, challenges were made, and the race began. After a while, one boat started to lag behind, because of lack of fuel. A young man on the boat took some of the cargo and burned it in the fire, and when the rest of the crew saw that the fire was good, they used up the rest of the cargo as fuel, to continue the race. They won the race but lost their cargo.

 God has given us cargo, too – that is, children, spouses and friends. It is our duty to safely bring them to the Lord as their destination. If, however, the ride itself becomes more important than the people with us, those people will suffer. How much can we sacrifice our families to be successful in our personal lives? How many families do not reach the Lord at the end because the competitive captain is too aggressive in his journey?

 Therefore, dearly beloved, it is up to us to be different as Christian families. We obey, we care for each other and are patient for each other for the Lord! Otherwise, our human efforts will take us to oblivion, to a godless and immoral life, whether we like it or not.

 May the Lord wake us up, so that we may have genuinely Christian homes, full of the fear of God, instead of homes with godless and human-driven atmospheres.

A Christian family is different in its internal interpersonal relationships than a non-Christian one. In a Christian home, it is the awareness of God’s Presence that shapes the interpersonal relationships between each family member. God bless you all. Amen.