

“Removing Family ERR-Looms”

Colossians 3:1-17

Sermon Series: The Missing Peace Week 3: Peace in the Family

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Since we've been doing several puzzles during Covid, our daughter Kristin gave us a puzzle of one of my favorite family pictures. Yet when we finished it, I noticed the puzzle was missing some crucial pieces – namely me!

Is your family puzzle missing peace? In our Missing Peace series we've looked first at Peace with God and then, Meg helped us find Peace within by turning anxieties into prayers. Now we arrive at a third place we all need to find peace: the family. Home is supposed to be our refuge from noise, conflict and confusion. The family is supposed to be where relate peacefully to each other. Yet a family can be puzzling. Your family may feel more like a combat zone than a comfort zone. Instead of Ozzie Nelson, your family may resemble Ozzie Osborne's. When you look back at the family you came from, what counselors call your “Family of Origin,” you may recall far more wars and wounds than peace talks and patience. When you look around the family you are in now, there may be more arguments than agreements. All this tension is magnified while we live in close quarters during covid. How do you find the missing peace in your family?

In his letter to the Colossians Paul writes,

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace Colossians 3:15

What Paul says about a church family is also true for a human family. A family is like a body. Just as all parts of the body play their role, so do all members of a family. They are woven together. They depend on each other. Illness in one area affects all the others. Peace comes to the body when all the parts work in harmony with each other.

Some years ago counselors made this discovery: **A Family is a System just like the Body.** Each family member is connected to all the others and each has a part to play in making war or peace, illness or health. A counselor cannot treat just one family member and ignore all the others. Just as parts of the body perform different roles, counselors identify roles members play in the family such as hero, rescuer, mediator, scapegoat, switchboard, clown, cheerleader, nurturer or powerbroker. These roles are not all negative. Which role do you play in your family? Are you using your role to disturb the peace or restore it?

Another biblical truth which counselors see is: **A Family Inherits ERR-Looms.** In olden days, a loom was a tool for a trade such as weaving clothing. Looms were so expensive and essential they would be passed down in the will to an heir – thus making them an “heirloom.” Today, a family heirloom can be anything from a valuable piece of furniture to a cheap tchotchke you sell on ebay.

More than looms are passed down from one generation to the next. When I was a kid on Halloween I put on a Superman costume. And when my children were little they both put on Super costumes. So now you know the truth: our family is from the planet Krypton. Yet families pass down negative traits which are not so super. This is true back to ancient times. The prophet Ezekiel asks,

What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? Ezekiel 18:2

The sins of one generation (sour grapes) impact the next (bad teeth). Anger, alcoholism, adultery, anxiety in the parents affect the children and grandchildren. These are the Family ERR-Looms which are passed down to succeeding generations. Mistakes and sins made in one generation are repeated in the next. When you grow up with such family errors you don’t even notice them or recognize the hurt and harm they cause. They are normal – what you’ve always known.

Paul tells us to get rid of err-looms so we don’t inflict them on another generation.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other. Colossians 3:5-9

Paul lists two groups of err-looms – practices which poison relationships and families. The first list is Internal: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. These are cravings inside us: thoughts, desires, hungers, temptations, compulsions, obsessions, addictions. Paul summarizes them with one word: idolatry. Two weeks ago we did an Idolatry Inventory – to find the idols which disturb your peace with God. These same idols destroy family relationships and are passed down from generation to generation.

Internal Cravings are extremely difficult to discuss. These are usually carefully guarded family secrets. Why? Cravings cause tremendous guilt, shame and fear of punishment. So people keep their cravings secret and secrecy is exactly what cravings need to continue. Like mold, cravings love to grow in the darkness. Some cravings are: Money, Power, Lust, Food, Work, Alcohol, Drugs, Acceptance. Paul says these cravings belong to our earthly nature. The culture of this earth repeatedly triggers this part of our natures. This is the way the culture manages, manipulates us and makes money off us. Have you noticed how often they talk about the billions you can win with the powerball, the ads for online gaming, the promotion of recreational marijuana, and the use of sex in commercials, mainstream movies and the porn industry? The culture takes God’s good creation and makes it an idol. These are the same idols from the Old Testament. The only thing that’s changed is the technology which makes it easier to deliver the triggers.

Internal Cravings lead to the next list **External Ravings**. When idols take over they change the way we relate to each other in the family. Paul lists six External Ravings:

anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language and lying. Harsh Words, Cutting Sarcasm, Cruel Names, Clever Putdowns, Constant Arguments, Self-pity, Abuse, Denial, Dishonesty destroy families. These are the outer symptoms of an inner sickness. You can't stop the External Ravings if you don't identify and remove the Internal Cravings. This is extremely difficult when a person is deep in denial about their Cravings. We lie to ourselves saying: It's not that bad. I can handle it. I can stop anytime. I vow to never do it again. These are lies we tell ourselves and each other. Paul says,

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Colossians 3:9-10.

Why is it impossible to free ourselves from Inner Cravings? We must take off the old self on the inside and invite the Holy Spirit to put the new self within us. Remember the Superman suit I wore as a child? On the fabric it said, "Remember, only the real Superman can fly." I guess too many children tried to jump off the sofa. There are a lot of teens and adults walking around today who think they are supermen and women. Their egos tell them they don't need help from God or others. They try to solve their problems with their own power. This is why so many men, women, teens and families crash and burn. We need God's power and the help of others if we hope to heal ourselves and our families. This is a daily act of surrender to the Spirit. Every time the culture triggers my cravings I have a decision: do I slip back into my old ways or ask the Spirit for help.

Making the right decision is impossible without the love and power of the real superman: Jesus Christ. Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen once said:

I cannot continuously say no to this or no to that, unless there is something ten times more attractive to choose. Saying no to my lust, my greed, my needs, and the world's powers takes an enormous amount of energy. The only hope is to find something so obviously real and attractive that I can devote all my energies to saying yes.... One such thing I can say yes to is when I come in touch with the fact that I am loved. Once I have found that in my total brokenness I am still loved, I become free from the compulsions.¹

The Holy Spirit gives you an **Inner Grace** which leads to **Outer Gifts** Paul says:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12-16.

¹ Terry Muck, "Hearing God's Voice and Obeying His Word," *Leadership Journal* (Winter 1982), p. 16

Grace is an unconditional gift. You are unconditionally chosen, holy and dearly loved by God. That's His gift. That's grace. If the center of your being beats and burns not with Internal Cravings but Inner Grace it changes the way you relate to everyone, especially your family. Inner Grace leads to Outer Gifts. The qualities Paul describes are gifts one person gives to another: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love. How do you replace your Inner Cravings with Inner Grace? If you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, if you are willing to be brutally honest with yourself about cravings that drive you, then ask God to replace your cravings with His love and grace. Find a counselor, a mentor, a support group that can help you receive freedom from your cravings one day at a time. It's not easy. It will take time and hard work. Yet that's the way to find the missing peace in your family. Stop the Family ERR-looms in your generation.

Ted Roberts was wounded by loads of family err-looms. Raised by an alcoholic mother, he never knew his real father. Unfortunately, he did know seven stepfathers who beat him as they paraded through his life. Ted reacted to these painful early years by excelling in every field. He was the first in his family to finish college. He graduated as a top Marine fighter pilot. Yet he couldn't run from the terrors of the past. He escaped through inner cravings for alcohol and pornography. He had no time for God.

In 1969, his life reached a major turning point. Half-drunk in a foxhole in the middle of a rocket attack in Vietnam, he read a love letter from his wife, Diane, speaking of her love for the Lord and him. Ted decided to try this prayer thing:

Christ, I really don't know who You are, and I don't do this church stuff very well, but my life has become totally insane. So if You are there, sign me up!"

When Ted returned home from the war in Vietnam, Jesus showed him the war inside.

I discovered a number of disturbing things about myself. To begin with, I was an alcoholic. But that was just the struggle on the surface of my life. At a much deeper level, I was addicted to pornography. In fact, my life was spinning out of control. Looking back on that time, I can see that control was a big issue with me—and the reason why anger constantly simmered just below my surface.

The Spirit worked on Ted to heal the external cravings, the inner cravings and the deep wounds which fueled them. He went through the painful process of healing which also healed his family. Ted Roberts not only became the pastor of the 7,000 member East Hills Church in Oregon, he founded Pure Desire Ministries which has helped thousands of men, women and families around the world find freedom from the inner craving of sexual addiction. If you feel even the hint that internal cravings are disturbing the peace in your family, don't keep it secret a moment longer. Come talk to me, find a Christian counselor, seek help from a support or recovery group. Make the Family ERR-loom stop with this generation.