

The Supremacy of Christ The Gospel and Relationships Colossians 3:18-4:1

Introduction

We are in the middle of Paul's description of Christian spirituality. As Christians, we acknowledge Jesus as the Creator of all things and accept His sacrifice on the Cross as sufficient to rescue us from this sinful life. When we do that, God initiates a significant and ongoing renovation project to help us become what he created us to be (3:10). It's an ongoing process until Jesus returns to the earth to establish His Kingdom and righteous rule. Until then, the Holy Spirit keeps working in us to make us more and more like Christ.

It's incredible that even with the mess and chaos we are experiencing in our world, God is at work building us up spiritually and helping us understand and embrace his plan. However, we must cooperate with the process. God's plan of healing and restoration in your life focuses upon building vital and healthy relationships.

Our lesson today in Colossians 3:18 – 4:1 describes some key relationships. The springboard for building enduring relationships is verse 17, "And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col 3:17 NKJV)

It all begins with an upward look. Without a stable relationship with God, none of your other relationships will reach their full potential. It shouldn't surprise us that God's renovation project centers around teaching us how to love him and how to love other people. Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Paul has spent the first few Chapters dealing with God's work and our relationship with him. In verse 18 of Chapter 3, he turns his attention to our relationships with others, beginning with the closest human relationship, marriage.

I. The Marriage Relationship.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them." (Col 3:18-19 NKJV)

Some people hear "wives, submit," and that's it; they're turned off and won't listen to anything further. But Paul doesn't stop there. He says the submission is to your own husband, and as it is fitting in the Lord. And then he adds, "Husband, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them." So let's examine this a little bit.

The ancient Greek word translated submit is a word borrowed from military life. It means "to be under in rank." As you know, the U.S. army is organized in levels called ranks. The different ranks are generals, colonels, majors, captains, sergeants, and privates. The reason the military system works is that each level

respects those in a higher rank. A private might be smarter, more talented, and have better character than his general. But he is still *under rank* to the general. He submits to the general because of his position.

Submission is a tough thing to practice these days, considering the current state of lawlessness in our country. Nevertheless, no society or relationship can survive without order and submission. In the same way, a wife doesn't submit to her husband because he *deserves* it. She submits because he is her husband.

Submission is not related to being smarter or better or more talented. It is acknowledging a God-appointed order. Warren Wiersbe writes, "Anyone who has served in the armed forces knows that 'rank' has to do with order and authority, not with value or ability." In terms of value, each person is equal in the eyes of God. But when it comes to identity of role or function, there is a lot of variety and disparity.

Think of submission as being part of a team. If you think of the family as a team, think of the husband as the "captain" of the team. The wife has her place alongside the "captain," and the children have their place in relation to their parents.

You can't command submission. Submission must be offered. It is voluntary. In a marriage, a wife's submission is never to be forced on her by a demanding husband; that can be a recipe for disaster. A wise wife learns to defer to her husband, knowing that if he is the head, she is the neck that turns the head.

There are two crucial qualifiers Paul uses when referring to marital submission. First, he says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands." This defines the *sphere* of a wife's submission. The Bible does not command or even recommend a *general* submission of women to men. It is commanded only in the realm of the home and in the church. Men do not have exclusive authority in politics, business, education, medicine, or any other area. You'll find women in every one of these positions in the Bible. The other qualifier Paul uses is the phrase, "As is fitting in the Lord." This is a crucial phrase. It colors everything else we understand about this passage. There are two incorrect interpretations of this phrase I want to mention.

The first interpretation favors the husband, suggesting that "as is fitting in the Lord" means that a wife should submit to her husband as if he were God himself. I've even heard some try to back that idea up with the Scripture, "Sarah called Abraham, Lord."

Every person should submit to God in absolutely everything without question, but Paul limits a wife's submission to her husband "as is fitting in the Lord." Nowhere in Scripture does it teach absolute submission other than to God. There are limits to the submission your employer can expect of you. There are limits to the submission the government can expect of you. There are limits to the submission parents can expect of children. And there are limits to the submission a husband can expect of his wife. To violate this is to commit the sin of idolatry.

The second faulty interpretation favors the wife, suggesting that “as is fitting in the Lord” means “I’ll submit to him as long as he does what I think the Lord wants.” I’m afraid that’s also not right. There are indeed limits to a wife’s submission, but those limits do not include, “I’ll only submit to my husband if I agree with him or I’ll submit to him when he makes the right decisions and carries them out the right way.” “If he makes a wrong decision or one I don’t like, then I don’t have to submit to him.” That’s not submission at all. Most everyone can submit to others when they agree with them. Submission is only tested when there’s a disagreement.

“As is fitting in the Lord” does not define the extent or the limits of a wife’s submission. It defines motive. A wife’s submission to her husband is an expression of her submission to God. It honors God’s Word and His order of authority. It is part of her Christian duty and discipleship. As is the case in every human relationship, the command to submit is not absolute. There are exceptions, but exceptions should not become the rule.

To the husband, Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives.” Paul’s words to husbands safeguard his words to wives. A wife’s submission never excuses a husband acting like a tyrant.

The ancient Greek word for love is agape. It puts a significant obligation upon the husband. Agape is not romantic or sensual love. It is a love that occupies itself with caring for others. It is a deliberate attitude of mind that concerns itself with the well-being of another. It is sacrificial, giving, and compassionate love. It has more to do with the will than with emotion. It is a love that loves without changing its mind. It is a love that gives without demanding or expecting repayment. It is a love so great it can love the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that overcomes rejection. It gives because it loves; it does not love to receive.

Paul doesn’t say, “Husband, be nice to your wife,” although this would be a huge improvement for many marriages. Paul’s words reach even deeper. What he really means is, “Husbands, continually practice self-denial and self-sacrifice for the sake of your wives.” Agape love is the kind of love Jesus has for each of us, and it is the love husbands should imitate towards their wives. Ephesians 5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” ([Eph 5:25 NKJV](#))

Paul also says that the husband is not to be bitter towards his wife. Even if you think you have good reason to be resentful or bitter, you must love your wife with agape love. It is self-sacrificing, self-giving love. God expects a pretty high level of Christ-like attitude and behavior from Christian husbands. A husband may feel entirely justified in his harsh or unloving attitude and actions towards his wife, but he is not justified – no matter how the wife has been towards the husband.

Agape loves even when there are apparent and glaring deficiencies and even when the receiver is unworthy of the love.

II. The Parent-Child Relationship

In verse 20, Paul addresses the parent-child relationship. "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 3:20-21 NKJV)

First, let's tackle, "Children, obey your parents in all things." I'm pretty sure Paul has in mind children who are still in their parents' household and under their authority. According to Ephesians 6:2, children must not only honor their father and mother but must obey them too in all things. "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER," which is the first commandment with promise: "THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU AND YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH." (Eph 6:2-3 NKJV)

When a child grows up and leaves home, he is no longer under the same obligation of obedience, but the responsibility to honor your father and mother remains. The most important reason children should obey their parents is because it is "well-pleasing to the Lord." Children learn to respect God's order and authority in other areas of life by respecting their parent's authority.

There is an order of authority and submission that reaches to the highest levels. Even the Godhead practices an order of authority and submission. The Father is All in All. The Son is the Creator and yet submitted to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is All-Powerful yet carries out the wishes of the Son. Ephesians 4:6 says there is "one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph 4:6 NKJV)

In Colossians 3:11, Paul says that Christ is all in all. In 1 John 5:7, it says, "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." (1Jn 5:7 NKJV)

Our failure to practice Biblical authority, and our failure to submit to Biblical authority, isn't just wrong; it is a sin against the very nature of God.

Secondly, Paul says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children." Ephesians 6 add, "to wrath." Children know how to push your hot buttons. Parents sometimes react with anger and hostility rather than taking the right action of nurture and training. Of course, children have a responsibility to obey their parents; but parents also have a responsibility to control themselves and not push their children to the brink of frustration and inner hostility.

Parents provoke their children by being too harsh, too demanding, too controlling, unforgiving, or just plain unrelenting anger. This harshness can be expressed through words, actions, and even non-verbal communication. It's easy to blame your child for bad behavior or wrong choices. But Paul also reminds us that the bad behavior and choices can actually be *provoked* by parents. It doesn't justify the child's bad behavior, but it may explain part of its cause.

It's also a reminder that parents need to work at not provoking their children. To provoke means to irritate by exacting commands, perpetual fault finding and unnecessary interference. Parents, and especially fathers, should be careful not to irritate their children by being so unreasonable in their demands that their children lose heart and come to think that it is useless to try to please their parents.

Children who grow up with parents who constantly provoke them will become discouraged. They will not feel the love and the support from their parents that they need to gain confidence and skill in developing relationships. They may even come to believe that the whole world is against them since they don't feel the love and support from their parents.

It's important to season our parenting with lots of grace. We should also be gracious, gentle, forgiving, and longsuffering with our children since God is with us. And finally, Paul addresses the employer/employee relationship.

III. Employer/Employee Relationships

In verse 22, Paul writes, "Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." (Col 3:22-4:1 NKJV)

As Christians, we should show a proper and submissive attitude towards our boss. (Paul uses the word "masters," which, in a modern context, would be employer or supervisor.)

Employees have a God-ordained responsibility of obedience and submission to their employers or supervisors. Christian employees have the greatest reason to faithfully and conscientiously perform their work. We are, above all else, the servants of Christ and we work first and foremost to please him.

There are no guarantees of fairness or proper treatment in a job situation. Sometimes bad workers are unfairly rewarded, and good employees are penalized or left out. Paul assures us that there is a final reward and punishment without partiality when we stand before God.

Paul also says that Christian employers are to be just and fair. It is a terrible thing for a boss to cheat or mistreat his workers, but far worse for a Christian to do it. In a culture that practiced and promoted slavery, Paul made the point that slaves and free were equals in the body of Christ. Every human being is to be treated fairly and justly.

We must realize that no matter what our position in life, we are required to fulfill our responsibilities as representatives of Christ.

Conclusion

We began and now end with verse 17, "And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col 3:17 NKJV)

The more I thank God for all He has given me through Christ, the better I can practice His love towards others. Receiving God's love helps me appreciate and cherish the relationship I have with God.

Building healthy relationships with God, my wife, my children, my boss, and my fellow employees helps me become the person God created me to be. It helps me put aside a self-centered lifestyle. It helps me to be a giver instead of a taker. And it leads me towards a fulling life in Christ.

In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:4, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Mat 22:37-40 NKJV)

The most important work you can do while you are journeying through this earth is to build healthy relationships and remember that God loves people most of all, so treat them well.