

Relating God's Way

Colossians 3:18-4:6

Introduction

We have all heard someone say, "He tried to prove something, but in doing so he took some things out of context." Have you ever done this, or had it done to you? Had your words taken out of context and twisted into something you never intended? If you have, then you know how frustrating it can be.

The proper context is always extremely important. If we were to take our passage from Colossians today out of context, we might think the Apostle Paul was extremely legalistic. He just formulated a bunch of rules to follow. In fact, he's setting us up for a lot of failure since these rules seem almost impossible to follow.

So...as we enter into our text for this morning, it's important we take it within context. The theme for all of Colossians is "Jesus Christ, above all others." He is preeminent over all things. He is the creator, through whom all things were made, and in whom all things hold together. Christ Jesus is God Himself, in whom all the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

It was because of His death and resurrection that we have been made right with God. And we who are IN Christ Jesus, we have died to our old life, we were buried with him in baptism, and we have been raised with him from the dead. Living Hope Church, if you are in Christ, your spiritual life is hidden with Christ in God as he currently sits at the right hand of the Father.

Do not add to these truths of the gospel? Do not subtract from them? They are your redemption, your salvation, and now your ongoing sanctification.

SO...we have to remember that these commands are written to a *redeemed* people. They are written to a people who have access to the power of the Holy Spirit to carry them out. Living Hope Church, we cannot do these things apart from our connection to Christ, who is indeed above all things. Keep Christ in focus as we move through this passage.

Last week, Paul wrote that we are to put to death all the earthly things in us, and put on the new self. But how does this new life work itself out in that practical day-to-day relationships that we have each day. That is what the Apostle Paul addresses in our passage today. He gets very practical. And I think the D6 curriculum states the main point of our passage very well:

All my interactions with others are opportunities to glorify Christ and point people to Him.

And Paul addresses these different interactions in three areas of our lives: Family Relationships, Work Relationships, and Community Relationships. So let's take each of these areas one at a time...

1. Glorify Christ with Your Family Relationships (3:18-21).

Family relationships were very important to the apostles. In our series through 1 Peter, we studied what Peter taught in chapter 3. The apostle Paul writes more fully on this at the end of

Ephesians 5. The rules stated here in Colossians are very succinct but are full of truth that again, if applied to those who are IN Christ, are profound in keeping Christ central to our lives. So let's begin with verse 18, "*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*" Let me state it this way:

Wives, delight in Christ as you submit to your husbands.

Uh oh! Submission! In our culture today, "submit" is a dirty word. However, our definition of submission needs to come from the Bible. We can't define it according to some feminist or chauvinist view. In fact, Paul introduces his household rules in Ephesians with these words:

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

The idea of submission isn't about an inferior person submitting to a superior person. In the Bible, Christian marriage involves **mutual** submission. Both wives AND husband are to yield their personal desires for the good of the other person.

It might be helpful to begin by defining what submission is NOT! Sam Storms in his Meditation on Colossians gives some great points here. First of all, God's Word does not call upon a wife to accept brutality or thievery or abuse. If that's the situation, she needs help and she needs to get out. Secondly, submission does not mean the wife suppresses her creativity and becomes passive in life. Next, submission doesn't mean silence. A wife *should* offer constructive criticism, should make requests of her husband, and even teach her husband at times.

Storms goes on to write that the verb translated "submit" carries the implication of voluntary yieldedness to a recognized authority.

Think about creation and man and woman from Genesis. From what bone of the man did God create the woman? The rib! It was from Adam's side, not his foot. This implies to me that Eve was an equal with Adam and created as a perfect "helper" for him. In fact, that same word for helper is ascribed to God as our helper. And certainly no one here would say that God is inferior to us, right?

However, who was created first? Adam! So I do believe there is an order in creation that God wants to be firm and established. The man was first—the head—and has certain responsibilities because of that (which we'll talk about in a moment). The wife is to willingly follow her husbands' leadership *in Christ*.

So how can we define godly submission of a wife to her husband. First, submission is the disposition to honor and affirm a husband's authority and an inclination to embrace his leadership. Secondly, it is an attitude and act of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. And thirdly, it is a commitment to support one's husband in such a way that he may reach his full potential as a man of God.

And as a wife submits to her husband she models the very attitude and character of Christ Himself. Jesus submitted his will to the will of the Father. In this, he became OUR servant, humbling himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And as that humble, obedient servant, God has exalted Him and given him glory.

Wives, as you submit to your husbands, delight in the fact that you follow the Lord Jesus' submissive life that results in praise and glory to the Son. Sometimes it may be difficult to submit. There may be times that you really don't want to. But remember, it's not about you! It's all about Christ, who is above all things. Let that always be your motivation.

So now let's move to verse 19: "*Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.*" Let me state it this way:

Husbands, model Christ by loving your wives.

As I said earlier, God has created an order in creation in which husbands are the head of the family. But again, this is so often misunderstood. Headship in the Bible *never* commands husbands to *rule* their wives. No, the Bible commands husbands to *love* their wives. Headship is never about SELF but is always described in the Bible as selfless service.

Husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them. Within Roman society men were given unlimited power to be the head of the family, and they did not treat their wives with respect and love. Paul is turning that upside down. True spiritual leadership involves service, it involves a husband putting aside his own interest in order to care for his wife.

Paul explains this more fully in Ephesians 5 when he writes that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Husbands, as you love and care for your wives, you too get to model the very work of Christ in salvation for us. The sacrificial death of Christ that provides us forgiveness from sins can be modeled to your family and to the world in your loving care for your wife. If that be your attitude, what wife would not readily submit to that, just as she submits to Christ.

Now husbands, you may sometimes struggle with this. There may be times when you really don't want to love your wife like this. But again, remember, it's not about you. It's all about Christ, who is above all things. Loving your wife isn't primarily about you, it's about bringing glory to Christ and pointing people to him.

May our marriages be so Christ honoring that they are a beautiful picture of what Christ has done for us. May the unbelieving world be attracted to Christ as we fulfill his calling as Christian wives and husbands.

Now onto verse 20: "*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*" Let me say it this way:

Children, please the Lord as you obey your parents.

Children, listen up! These next two commands involve you. First of all, obey your parents. Why? First and foremost because it pleases the Lord. But also, it's wise to obey them. Your parents love you and desire to guide you into men and women who serve the Lord and are productive citizens in the world. They've been around to block and *usually* know what they're talking about.

Don't give them unwarranted grief. Just obey them. And the more obedience they receive the more happiness and encouragement they can give to you in return. The more disobedience you give, the more strife and pain you will bring.

I tell my sons all the time when they complain about restrictions that it usually comes as a direct result of disobedience and untrustworthiness. Believe it or not, having an attitude of obedience towards your parents can actually be somewhat self-serving. The more you obey, the more your parents trust you and can extend more privileges and encouragement to you.

And as we already saw, being obedient to your parents allows you to share in the same attitude of Christ Himself, who was obedient unto death. Your obedience models Christ to the world.

Now, I know it's not always easy. Sometimes you don't want to obey your parents. But hey, it's not about you! It's all about bringing glory to Christ, who is above all things. Let that motivate your obedience!

And now onto the final family relationship rule in verse 21: *"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."* I'll state it this way:

Parents, honor Christ as you disciple your children.

Now this command is directed to fathers, probably because they had the primary responsibility to discipline their children. However, Paul has just commanded obedience to *"parents"*, both mothers and fathers, so I'm sure both parents have a responsibility to not provoke their children.

"Provoke" refers undue severity in disciplining your children. Discipline and punishment are certainly necessary at times, but it should always be administered in love and wisdom. Otherwise, your children might become discouraged. They might start believing that they can't live up to your standard, and therefore they can't live up to God's standard.

Don't ever give your children the idea that your love and acceptance is based upon their ability to obey perfectly. Our relationship to God isn't based upon this. Instead, God loves us, and because of that, we obey. Sure we mess up and need discipline, but a healthy understanding of God as Father means that we always know we are loved and accepted.

Parents, you have the privilege of modeling that very same love of God through Christ to your children. That's why I stated this point as *"honor Christ as you disciple your children."* The way you love, care and discipline your children has huge impacts upon the way they view their relationship to God.

And you parents with younger children, start NOW in instructing them in the ways of the Lord. That's partly why I'm so excited about the D6 materials. They provide ready-made resources to talk to your children and bring them up in the ways of the Lord. When they're young, they tend to enjoy spiritual times with you. Be wise with this time because as they reach the teenage years, they will have less desire for this. You still must demand it at times, but at this point in their lives, I must trust that my earlier training and instruction has taken root.

So please, parents, if you don't understand all the tools that are available through the D6 materials, come talk to me or another pastor and make sure you have all you need to disciple your children.

So as we close out this first section of our passage, we note again that we glorify Christ by following God's design for family relationships. And none of this is even possible without the

rule of Christ in our lives. Give glory and honor to Christ and Christ alone, who is above all things!

So the next section starting in verse 22 is summed up by saying:

2. **Glorify Christ with Your Work Relationships (3:22-4:1).**

Specifically, these commands instruct slaves and their masters. Although not instituted or condoned by God, slavery was a fact of life in Roman society. So Paul had to deal with how our freedom in Christ is carried out in a society where inequality continued. A lot could be said here about slavery, but I'm going to pass by a lot of that and let Pastor Ken deal with that next week as he teaches on the letter to Philemon which will tackle slavery head on.

And although Paul did not confront the institution of slavery and call for its abolition, the teachings of Christianity were instrumental in the ultimate demise of slavery.

So—in verse 22-25, Paul wrote this:

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.

I'll state the basic principle here like this:

Workers, work as if you work for Christ Himself.

Reverence for the Lord should motivate all our actions. Yes, even work is worship! This passage is clear: it is for Christ that we work, and it is from Christ that the reward will come.

Paul writes that Christians are to always fulfill their responsibilities to the best of their abilities. It doesn't matter who is watching us, or whether anyone is watching us at all. We work well because we know the eye of the Lord is upon us at ALL times.

So I ask you: can you be trusted to do your best, even when the boss is not around? *Always* do your best work because our first goal is serving Jesus. And again, you can model the character of Jesus as you work with integrity, just as Christ worked on our behalf.

And, I know, you may sometimes feel like slacking off. You might not always want to give your best. But again, just like I said before, I say it again: it's not about you! It's all about Jesus, who is above all things. Work as if you work for Christ!

Now, look at verse 25. Who does this apply to? The bondservant or the master? It's in the bondservant section so certainly it means that as we work, if we do wrong, we ultimately will be paid back for that wrong. However, surely Paul has the master in mind as well. If a master does wrong to his worker, he will be ultimately found out by God and be paid back for that.

And that leads then to 4:1: *"Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."* I'll state it like this:

Bosses, model Christlike character in the treatment of your workers.

Masters may have the upper hand in their life, but this verse reminds them that Christ is their ultimate master. And masters get the wonderful opportunity to also display the character of Jesus by treating their workers fairly and justly. No exploitation should be found within the Christian employer.

And sure, this may be difficult to implement at times. But again, it's not about you! It's all about Christ, who is above all things! We are always subject to Him, and He is the one whom we serve and honor in all our human interactions.

Remember, all of life, whether at work or in our families, whether it is significant or mundane, all of life is subject to the lordship of Christ. We can bring glory to Christ in our family and work relationships.

And this brings us to our final relational arena this morning:

3. Glorify Christ with Community Relationships (4:2-6).

First, you do that as you...

Give God the glory in all your prayers.

We learn about this in verses 2-4...

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

If there is any spiritual discipline that I personally have a lot of difficulty with it is prayer. But yet scripture is emphatic that we should pray. It is our lifeline to God. In fact, Paul writes here that we are to be *steadfast* in prayer. But if God knows what we need, and hears us the first time we pray, why must we be steadfast in our prayers?

Sam Storms is again helpful here. Perseverance in prayer is beneficial primarily for *us*, not for God. We all tend to be presumptuous, don't we? We assume that God should always do what we ask, when we ask, in the way we ask. Perseverant prayer helps us temper our selfishness.

Endurance in prayer also cultivates absolute dependence upon God. Persistence in prayer helps us weed out improper petitions. As we continue to pray, the Holy Spirit can help us pray properly and in line with God Word and His purposes.

And finally, endurance in our prayers cultivates patience. We must wait upon the Lord for his good and perfect timing. This can be hard and confusing amidst the circumstances of our lives, but God doesn't ask you to understand. He's asks you to be faithful.

And along with steadfastness in prayer, Paul call on us to prayer with thanksgiving. What are we thankful for in prayer? That God is actually there. That God listens to what we say. God is able to do above and beyond all we ask or think, and He has chosen to include you in he process.

Specifically, Paul calls the Colossians to pray for him and open doors to share the gospel. And remember, Paul is in prison as he writes, but he doesn't ask them to pray for the prison doors

to be opened. Instead, Paul asks for another “open door”, so that he may declare the mystery of Christ.

There is no greater prayer than for more people to receive the greatest gift of all—the salvation of their souls and a renewed relationship with their Creator. And nothing brings God greater glory than to give people the gift of himself.

So effective evangelism starts with persevering prayer. But not only should we *pray* for the gospel to go forth, Paul also calls us to...

Make Christ known in all your interactions with unbelievers.

We see this in verses 5 and 6:

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

When you are with your neighbors or coworkers or friends who don't know Christ, pray that Christ will be a central part of your conversations. Use wisdom in this! Don't beat them over the head with the Bible. Find creative ways to bring up the things of God, but don't let time slip away without making Christ known. You must make the best use of your time.

Additionally, never let your unbelieving friends doubt your genuine love for them. Never make your friends an evangelistic project. That would not be loving and gracious. Instead, love your friends so much that you are always ready to provide the best answers possible to the questions that they may have. And if you don't have the answers, seek them out, so that you may make Christ known in all your interactions. So that you might be able to declare the mystery of Christ.

Conclusion

And that has been the overarching theme of today's passage:

All my interactions with others are opportunities to glorify Christ and point people to Him.

We declare the mystery of Christ in all our interactions as wives, husbands, parents, children, workers, bosses, student, teachers, or friends. The way we interact can directly bring glory to Christ and point people to the mystery of Christ and what God has done in and through his Son to make atonement for sin.

We should so focus our lives so that every work, every action we take is not for ourselves, but to glorify Christ crucified and Christ risen for the salvation of lost souls. Jesus Christ is above all others. Cherish him. Love him. Glorify him. Speak well of him. Point people to the one whom God has highly exalted and given the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen.