

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

Scripture:

Colossians 3:18-4:1

[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.

4 [1] Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Pray

Introduction

According to the CDC in 2018 there were 2,132,853 marriages and 782,038 divorces in the U.S. Though that isn't necessarily the 50% divorce rate that we generally hear about it is still roughly a divorce rate of 39%.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, says that while in these relationships, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience some form of violence.

It shouldn't be shocking then that according to the Pew Research Center roughly around 30% of all Americans don't think marriage is important.

And in households where there are children The National Child Abuse Hotline says that every year more than 3.6 million referrals are made to child protection agencies involving more than 6.6 million children.

Lastly, when we look at employer employee relationships, we see that roughly about 50% of Americans are unsatisfied with their jobs and don't even feel like their employer is even loyal to them. This has led to a rise in job and career hopping. Through its own research the job company LinkedIn has noted that people will change jobs 12-15 times in their lifetime and will change careers an average of 5-7 times.

So why do all the statistics matter?

They matter because they point to the fact that human relationships within the family and larger framework of society are hard, messy, fallen, and marred by sin. And because of this many Americans, including many Christians, are slowly beginning to believe that these relationships are either unimportant, not necessary for a functioning society, or they are in need of a radical redefinition.

This is not entirely different from what Paul was facing in the early church and particularly within the Colossian church.

Think about it: He is writing to a church that is being led to believe that something besides Christ can give them a true and full knowledge and fulfilment. Things like angel worship, visions, human philosophies, and even extreme and severe self-discipline.

In this context it could have been easy for the Colossians to downplay the importance of family or household relationships within society and the church because they were being led to believe true spirituality was to be lived out or found in other ways.

Or consider what Paul writes to them in Colossians 3:11.

*[11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; **but Christ is all, and in all.***

Paul is rightly communicating that Christ is in every believer. And no matter our ethnicity, position in society, or gender, we are all one, we are all equal in Christ.

This teaching is revolutionary in a society that doesn't value women. A society where the only person that mattered was the man, who had the authority in the family and in all other spheres of life. A society where it's okay for a husband to beat a wife, where children were considered second class citizens, and slaves were often treated no better than cattle.

In this context it would have been easy for these believers to assume that their new found equality and freedom in Christ meant that they didn't need to live under or in these relationships of authority anymore.

But instead of abolishing these relationships, Paul, in keeping with the rest of Colossians 3 in which he talks about putting on the new self, helps these believers to see how they are live out their new identity and equality in Christ within the context of these relationships.

So today we will look at what Paul says about these household or societal relationships. We will see how we are to exist within them as Christians, and the purpose that God has for each one of them. Finally, we will receive an encouragement and call from Paul so that we will be able to live within and honor Christ in these relationships with all of the energy and joy that he so wonderfully supplies.

So let's begin by looking at the relationships themselves and how we are to live within them.

The Household Relationships

First is the **marriage relationship**. Colossians 3:18-19:

[18] Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

[19] Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Now for many today they begin to groan when we see that word **submit**. It conjures up images for us of a wife living in a marriage as a piece of property. She's owned by her husband, and must obey his every whim and fancy no matter what.

And within the early Romans society, that is exactly the way women were treated. They were property that must obey their husbands in all things or pay the price. In fact, one commentator writes that husbands in the ancient Roman society would **“congratulate themselves on having an obedient wife.”**

(Sarcastically) “Good job Jim, you really whipped her into shape.”

But this isn't what Paul is communicating. Instead of calling wives to a forced obedience he instead uses the word submit which in Greek is the word *hupōtassō*. This word points to a voluntary submission.

And not only is it a voluntary submission, but a wife does it as is fitting in the Lord. **This means that a wife doesn't blindly obey her husband authority but does it so long as what he is asking of her does not dishonor Christ.**

And as a side note, according to 1 Peter 3:1 this kind of voluntary submission applies to both the believing and unbelieving husband.

But then Paul does something that is countercultural. He turns his attention to husbands and calls the husbands within the church to love their wives, and to not be harsh with them.

Again, this is something we would all say yes and amen to today. But in this early society what mattered most was that the husbands kept their house and family in obedience to them. Love was not necessarily an integral part of marriage. In fact, it was seen as right for a husband to be angry and violent with his wife so long as it produced obedience.

But Paul turns this idea on its head by calling husbands to the same kind of self-giving, compassionate, and sacrificial love that was modeled by Christ. Paul makes this idea more explicitly clear in Ephesians 5:25 when he writes:

[25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

So instead of redefining the husband and wife relationship structure Paul instead, affirms it, and its authority structure shows how it should be lived out in Christ.

Because of our oneness and equality in Christ wives, you may now voluntarily, and as I will point out later joyfully, submit to your husband in ways that are in line with Christ. Likewise, husband, you do hold a position of authority over your wife, but it is a position of gentle, self-giving, and sacrificial love.

So, if that is what the husband and wife relationship should look like what does Paul say about the Father and child relationship. He writes in Colossians 3:20-21:

[20] Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

[21] Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

How many of you grew up being told children should be, “**seen and not heard**”? The ancient world basically had a more extreme version of this same concept. Children were basically property and generally were never addressed directly.

But once again, Paul turns this idea on its head. Meaning, that because we are all one and equal in Christ, Paul now addresses children as responsible persons in the church.

And his call to you if you are a young child or teenager who is under the authority of your parents is that you would obey your parents in everything, they would ask you to do. **Your parents ask you to clean your room you willingly obey. If they ask you to eat your vegetables, you willingly obey. They ask you say sorry to your brother or sister, you willingly obey.**

But here is the thing, remember what I said about a wife submitting to her husband? She willingly does it so long as it does not dishonor Christ. In the same way. Paul says that children should obey their parents because it pleases the Lord. Meaning, that you cannot obey if your parents ask you to do something that would not honor God. **Ex. If your parents asked you to steal, it would be right for you to refuse because that is against what God would want.** You would say to them what Peter and the other apostles said in Acts 5:29:

“We must obey God rather than men.”

But then Paul once again turns his attention to the men, the fathers. Now his words here by extension apply to all parents, but it is significant that he addresses fathers **because they are supposed to be the main authority figure in two parent homes.**

His call to the fathers in the room is to not embitter or provoke your children in a way that would cause them to lose heart.

I can imagine that there are people in this room that can relate to this. You grew up in a home where you were constantly trying to please your parents and it seemed like you could never measure up. So what do you do? You become discouraged and you gave up even trying.

But I can also imagine that, if we are honest, some of us have raised our kids this way. I have been so convicted of this as one of my children said to me once **“dad, it feels like you’re always mad at me.”**

Now, none of us generally desire to discourage our kids. We want them to be happy and grow to live productive and full lives. However, Paul has something more important in mind when he tells fathers to not provoke and discourage their children. He writes it this way in Ephesians 6:4:

[4] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Our main goal as parents, and especially fathers, should be to live with, love, and parent our kids in a way that shows them who Jesus is so that they too would want to believe and follow him. This leaves us no room for harsh anger that would embitter or discourage our children.

Finally, Paul turns his attention to slaves and their masters. He writes in Colossians 3:22-23 and 4:1

[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, (ESV)

4 [1] Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you have a Master in heaven.

In many of your Bibles this section probably has a heading above it that says something like **“Rules for Christian Households.”** And the reason that it says this is because in the ancient world a slave would live in the home of their master and therefore were part of that household.

But remember, slaves did not have any rights within the household and were often viewed like cattle. So once again Paul is taking a very revolutionary step by even addressing them. And he can do this because they too are free and equal men and women in Christ, and by all accounts were a big part of the early church.

But his call to them, despite being free and equal in Christ, was not to run away from their master, but rather to obey their master. And not only are they to obey their master, but they are to do it with a sincere heart whether their master is around or not. Why? **Because they are not merely working for men, but instead they are working for Christ.**

In the same way Paul addresses masters and calls them to treat their slaves justice and fairness because they are equal in Christ and because they have a perfectly just Master in heaven,

Now, I will say this, I realize there is a lot that could be said about this relationship and in particular the Bible's position on slavery, but I am choosing to not address it here today because I don't have the time and won't do it justice.

Instead many commentators have suggested that one of the relationships in our society that we can easily apply this relationship to is the employer/employee relationship.

So, this means that if you are an employee (which many of you are), God has called you to serve your employer, as if you are serving the living God. It doesn't matter if you are under paid, it doesn't matter if you don't like the work, it doesn't matter if you find it satisfying or not. **Our job is to sincerely and fully do our work as if it is for God.**

And if you are an employer it is your duty before God to give your employees a fair wage, to not overwork them, and to treat them in a way that shows that you value them want their good, just as God is just and is working for your good.

So there you have it. A very quick snapshot of what these three relationships of authority should look like in the home and society. Husband/wife, Father/children, and Master/slave (or in our context employer/employee).

Now, we could just end the sermon there. We could say, **“Amen, now go home and live these out.”**

But if we did that, we would miss out on the things that Paul says that ultimately become the fuel that will give us the desire to live these relationships out in the first place. I believe that fuel is found in the **purpose of these relationships and God's encouragement for us to endure in them.**

The Purpose of Household Relationships

I believe that Paul in this letter and throughout his epistles is trying to communicate to overarching purposes for these relationships. One, they are a reflection of the Triune God's relationship with us, and secondly, they bring God pleasure.

Let's first look at how they reflect God's relationship with us.

A Heavenly Reflection

Husbands/Wives:

The husband and wife relationship was one that was instituted by God from the perfect beginning of creation when God said in Genesis 2:24:

[24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

And it is this relationship that not only reflects the oneness that God has in himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but it also reflects the same relationship that Christ has with his bride, the church. As Paul says about marriage in Ephesians 5:32:

[32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Husbands sacrifice for and serve their wives just as Jesus served us and sacrificed himself on our behalf. And wives humbly and willingly submit to a husband's sacrificial leadership as we the church submit to Christ.

When marriages break down and spouses don't live these out we lose the picture of Christ that is meant to be so evident to us and also to the watching world.

Fathers/Children:

God instituted the father (parent)/child relationship in Genesis 1:28 when he said to Adam and Eve:

[28] Be fruitful and multiply...

Right then and there the parent child relationship was instituted. And these relationships were so important in God's eyes that he call children to honor their father and mother in the 10 commandments and all over the book of Deuteronomy he calls parents to teach and raise up their children in the way they should go.

This loving relationship is meant to point us to God as our loving Father and parent and to us as his children. As the apostle John writes in 1 John 3:1:

[1] See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...

And as his children we are to love our Father and walk in joyful obedience to him. As 1 John 5:3 says:

[3] For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Fathers and parents, how we love, teach, and lead our children will reflect to them and others who are God is as our daddy. And children, how you love and obey your parents will show the world great our God is and how worthy he is of being obeyed.

Slaves/Masters:

Now, before I talk about **slaves and masters** it is important to make a distinction. God instituted the marriage relationship and the parent child relationship from the beginning of time and these are institutions that God desires to have endure.

However, we must admit that the master slave relationship, is something that results from the fall, yet God still uses it to reflect something about his relationship with us.

We see in this relationship that Christ is our master in heaven as he writes in Colossians 4:1 and we are his servants or slaves. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:22:

[22] For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ.

Though we are not living in a slave master relationship today, how we live and work under authority, whether that is the government, or our employer will be a reflection of how we are to live under the authority of Christ. Likewise, if you are in a position of authority as an employer, how you treat your workers will be a reflection to them of who Christ is as the one true master of this world and all things.

So we live in these relationships because they are a reflection of who God is, how he relates to his people, and how we are to relate to him as our bridegroom, Father, and master.

The second purpose for these relationships is God's pleasure.

God's Pleasure

Look with me again at Colossians 3:18-24

[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.

Do you see it? We are to live in these relationships as a husband, a wife, a father/parent, a child, in authority, or under authority in a way that is not only consistent with who Christ is, but also shows that are greatest goal is to serve him, honor him, and show the world who he is. And according to verse 20 this pleases the Lord.

The heart and purpose behind these relationships and how we live in them is not merely our own satisfaction or desires, but it is the glory and pleasure of God. That overarching goal should reign supreme over all relationships and it should continually inform how we live in them.

So these are the two great purposes for these relationships. They serve as a reflection of our God's relationship with us, and the exist to bring God pleasure and glory.

Encouragement

Now, all of that being said, I realize that these relationships are still hard, they are still messy, and we still live in a fallen world like I said at the beginning. But my Encouragement to each one of us this morning is to continually remember the purposes that God has for us in these relationships.

When you are wronged by your spouse, when you want to be angry with them, when your kids disobey, when it feels like your parent gives you a greater punishment that you deserve (that just happened in our house last night), or when it feels like your boss doesn't respect you or when your employee messes a job up.

Remember, that we too need Christ just as much as they do. Remember that we work and live in these relationships for Christ and his pleasure and not for our own ends. Remember, that how we respond will either be a reflection of Christ or something else that is less than Christ.

Lastly, we all, as God's people, can and must fully and whole heartedly serve God in these relationships because we live in the knowledge that we are living for and running towards and serving Christ for something greater, the forever reward and inheritance waiting for us with him in eternity.

Listen to Paul's charge to us in Colossians 3:23-24:

[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.

Let's Pray.