

Waterloo Road Church

Colossians 3:18-4:1

Sunday, 15th, January, 2017 evening

It is vital here to go back to the context of these instructions. We need to go back to at least chapter 3:1. From here Paul develops a series of imperatives, -must does- of the Christian life.

In 3:1 we are commanded *So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

In verse 2 *Set your minds on things that are above,*

In verse 5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly...*

In verse 8 *you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie ...*

In verse 12 *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

In verse 15 ¹⁵ *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Verse 16 ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly*

Verse 17 ¹⁷ *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

In that context the verses before us are examples of how this works out in your home.

And what follows is 3 more commands:

4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

4:5 Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

4:6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Today's verses are in this context which you have been looking at in the last few Sunday evenings. Today's passage is not in isolation nor is it a definitive list of do's and don'ts. It is fundamentally a call to practice your faith in your home. The various roles listed are all home based, even slaves and masters although the same principles apply to employer/ employee relationships.

So Paul is saying do all in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to the Father for him.

Live in your home *seeking the things that are above, Set your minds on things that are above, Put to death, in your family, whatever in you is earthly... you must get rid in your home all corrupt things. You are to clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with each member of the family and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity* **in your home**

You are to *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,* in your home

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly in your home

whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Devote yourselves to prayer, at home

*Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders;
make the most of every opportunity.* in your
business

*Let your conversation be always full of grace,
seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to
answer everyone.* in your home and in your
business

If you have never applied your faith to your home life, then wake up because it is at home where the real you comes out. At church you can be all PC and correct, but when we get home, it is often a different story.

Secondly, Paul writes some very similar words in Ephesians but there he prefaces it with Eph. 5:21 *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

My I suggest the normal idea of subservience in submitting is not what Paul is talking about. In fact I would go as far as saying it has more to do with putting the interests of others above yourselves. That is a mark of true Christlikeness. Jesus put your interests above all others. He gave up heaven to live on this earth, to live and die as a sacrifice for sins. Your salvation is about what he gives not what you demand.

The verbs in this passage are most telling.

Submit, love, obey, do not be harsh, obey, provide for.

They are the movement in relationships. Putting others needs above your own, love, being obedient to, not bullying, making proper provision for others. Secondly can I point out that it does not say that husbands can demand submission or parents can demand obedience. It says husbands are to

love and parents are not to be harsh. So often we look to scripture to strengthen our power base but in fact there is no help for you here. If your wife will not submit, you have to love her, if your child is disobedience, you must not be harsh.

What Paul does here is pick out a few classifications and apply those principles to as examples.

Wives, submit to your husbands,

Husbands, love your wife

Children obey

Fathers do not be harsh

Servants obey

Masters provide what is needful

But you could just about apply the verbs to any group. He could have said wives love your husbands, husbands provide for your

wives, children do not bully your parents, servants provide what is proper, masters, love your employees.

Why does he pick his examples? I think because in the context they needed to be reinforced. The gospel of Jesus is the greatest pillar of equality. We believe that every person, regardless of their classification is loved by God, offered salvation and forgiveness by grace to be received by faith. This was and still is a revolution in thinking.

So it may well be that Paul is reacting to wives thinking that the new freedom was without responsibility. In that they would be wrong. Our freedom in Christ is to enable us to serve one another, to love one another to put others interests above our own to provide of others. And marriage is the key relationship in which that is proved. So Paul

says that Husbands and wives are to be looking out for each other. Loved each other, serving each other. That is why he talks in 1 Corinthians about singleness being preferred. It is intrinsic in a marriage relationship that we do these things. We believe marriage is a partnership based on the commitment to give oneself up for the other. That is exemplified by using marriage as an example of the church's relationship with Jesus. He gave himself up for us. That is the model.

As part of pastoral care, my wife and I have done marriage classes. They are always a bit of a stock-take for our own marriage relationship. In the business of work, children, church, family, friends, it is easy to put your marriage lower down on the 'to do' list. If this passage is to be of value to you today as a married person, then take a check-up on how your relationship is

progressing. Find time to talk about it and listen to the other partner and pray together about it. It will not only protect your marriage it will strengthen all other relationships.

Secondly, the parent/ child relationship. Here we don't have time to dwell on the details but take a note of the direction. It is children he tells to obey, he does not tell parents to demand obedience.

The reason - *for this pleases the Lord* – is about the child's relationship with Jesus. We as children obey because we are setting our thinking in the spiritual realm, not in the corrupt old ways of self- interest.

In context, many children would have come from non-Christian homes. Paul is calling us to live our lives in the situation we are in, not some ideal fantasy world. Obeying is easy when you are asked to do what you want to do, the toughy is when it goes against what

you want. At that point, remember, Jesus was the one who said *‘Not my will, but yours be done.’*

One point has to be made here is that the context was of extended families with clan-like structures so the expectation was about clan-loyalty. We are called to work out our spirituality in the context of the world we are born in not just opt out of it.

Secondly, we must as parents recognise that our relationship with our children morphs from total dependence as a new-born baby to independence in adulthood. In later life the dependence may be reversed with the parent dependant on the child for their needs physical and emotional. Somewhere in-between is the nightmare called teenage – when your children want independence and you want them to remain children. This is saying that each step of that, sometimes

tortuous path, has to be worked out with reasonable demands and sensible obedience. I have four children and each presented different challenges to that. Let's keep in mind that the family is where we work out the gospel of grace and faith together.

The third pairing in master, slave. Few of us employ servants, hopefully none of you have slaves, it is after all illegal and morally wrong.

Many of us have to work this out in a modern workplace. In Paul's time industry was an extension of a family business. Today we have a rather detached view of employment.

The principles here apply. Employees are to work as to the Lord. Employers are to provide what is needed - Health and safety, proper conditions of employment, proper wage levels and so on. Much of our

legislation on employment comes from Christian principles being worked out, including this passages principles. The problem is that in a post-Christian society we are constantly having people finding ways round the legislation because they have lost sight of the concept of the equality that comes from being 'in Christ'. But I want you to reflect on the difference in attitude we are called to have in work. Responsibility lies with both employer and employee to make it work. In the context of the rail disputes, remember that from a Christian perspective the questions are about whether the managers are more concerned with profit over their staff and whether staff are more concerned about what they can get rather than what they can give to the success of the business.

So to summarise, our gospel is a calling to a transformed life which is all about clothing

yourself with compassion and humility, about submitting to the peace of Christ I ruling in your hearts, to living a life of thankfulness to God, and in that context, here are a few pointers to how that works out in our relationships, whether that is husband and wife, parent and child, employer or employee. Notice that each relationship must-do is connected with a reason which relates to your relationship with Jesus:

- *as is fitting in the Lord.*
- *for this pleases the Lord.*
- *with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.*
- *you know that you also have a Master in heaven*

There has to be love and submission in a marriage relationship, there has to be obedience and gentleness in a family, there has to be mutual commitment to keep to the contract of employment. There is no charter

here for demanding submission, or obedience or unreasonable extensions to working hours, conditions of service or lack of effort as an employee. You work out your spirituality in every relationship, so what would you add to Paul's list? Wider family? Neighbours, church members? We have here just three key relationships but the principles must permeate all our relationships including the postman, the checkout assistant and even the person who cut you up on the way to work!

Love, submit, obey, do not bully, provide and serve faithfully they are the evidences that Jesus is transforming your life and the Holy Spirit is at work.