

## **Christian Living**

**Colossians 3:18-4:1**

**By [Ralph Kelley](#)**

If you would, open up your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3. We have some Bibles in the back of the room if you need one of those; help yourself. Colossians chapter 3. Well obviously we must not have advertised as well this week as we did last week for Tim Keller or else I'm sure the crowd would have been just the same! Not that my feelings are hurt or anything like that, but thank you all, you know! Wasn't that a great week last week? That was just fantastic.

As we get into this last part of Colossians chapter 3, just a reminder to you that Paul, in all of his writings, we see it a lot especially in these epistles to the different churches, he puts out indicatives and imperatives. He tells us who we are in Christ and then he tells us how we ought to live because of who we are in Christ. And chapter 3 is just an absolute picture-perfect one, as verse 1 starts with, "If then you have been raised with Christ," and then kind of just goes off for the rest of the chapter telling us since we are in Christ how it is that we are to live. So as we look at this passage tonight, we want to remember that these imperatives of how we should live are based on the foundation that we are belonged to by Jesus Christ. So with that in mind, let's look at Colossians chapter 3 beginning in verse 18.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Slaves, 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. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Amen. This ends the reading of God's holy Word.

## **A Changing Culture and the Constancy of the Word of God**

The world that we live in is changing awfully fast, isn't it? We see today a world that ten years ago we never would have seen coming. The way the world has redefined marriage, the way the world has redefined family, the way the world has redefined society - it's amazing how quickly that has come upon us and it's not going away anytime soon. And this passage that we have before us this evening I think can really help us as we think about, "How do we engage with the world?" As a pastor, you learn quickly a few things about people when you get up to preach. And one is, as people begin inevitably to feel the need to rest for a little bit and their eyes begin to close, there's three ways for sure that you can always get their attention. The first way is, just hit that pulpit a little bit and they're going to look up at you. The other way is, all you have to do is say the word, "sex," and everybody is going to look up at you. And the third way is to use the other "s" word and that is, "submission." And that's what we have in our passage tonight. I was struck by being the executive minister here how poorly I did in planning all of this as I was the one who planned out this schedule and I planned myself to preach the week after Tim Keller was here to preach and I picked this passage that I would preach on, and instead of passing it off to one of the interns - as I was working on this passage this week I was thinking, "I sure do wish I had done that," because there's no doubt about it that when we talk about wives submitting to your husbands that often brings out a rather harsh reaction from people.

## **Male and Female: In the Image of God for the Glory of God**

But I want us to keep in mind as we look at this is what we're talking about here is this is an opportunity to model Christ's submission to the Father and the Holy Spirit's submission to the Father and the Son. Here's a newsflash for you - men and women are different. They are! They look different, they feel different, and they act different. And that's ok. Again, our world is trying to tell us that everybody is the same, but God's Word here tells us that men and women are different. I want to assure you that Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as he's writing this, is not thinking of women in a lesser role; just the opposite. You can read throughout Paul's writing that he's a champion for women over and over. Men and women may be different but they are equal. One thing I picked up on off of the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is a statement. I won't read all of their statement of faith but here's a few points that I think we want to bracket our conversation with tonight. One is that, "Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God, as persons, and distinct in their manhood and womanhood. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order and should find an echo in every human heart. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the fall and it was not a result of sin." Fourthly, "The fall introduced distortions into the relationship between men and women." And lastly, that "The Old Testament as

well as the New Testament manifest the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women. Both Old and New Testaments affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community.”

### **A Word for Wives**

So when we come to this question of, “Well what does this mean to say that wives are to submit themselves to their husbands?” One definition says that “submission refers to a wife’s divine calling to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and to help carry it through according to her gifts. It’s not an absolute surrender of her will. Rather, we speak of her disposition to yield to her husband’s guidance and her inclination to follow his leadership.” And that’s the way that we want to consider this matter. Women, you are called to be submissive to your husbands. It’s the opportunity to surrender your will for the purpose of fulfilling what God’s call is to you as a wife. One thing that Paul qualifies here is that “Wives, submit to your husbands, as it is fitting to the Lord.” And that’s a word there to remember. Though wives are called to submit to their husband, the husbands are the head of the household; the husband’s authority stops at any point where he tries to lead his wife into sin and she should never follow him into sin and he should never use his position as a reason to try to drag his wife into sin. So women, it’s hard. There’s no doubt about it. There are times that, as a wife you will look around and you’ll struggle and you’ll think, “I grasp for wanting to be in that position,” and yet the Lord calls you to take the posture of humility and submission for the good of the family and of your marriage.

### **A Word for Husbands**

But husbands, fear not; the Lord has a word for you also. It says in verse 19, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.” Here, husbands, we’re called to model Christ’s love for the Father and for His people. In Ephesians 5, Paul expands even more on this thought and he says at the beginning of verse 25 there, he says, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes it and cherishes it just as Christ does the church because we are members of his body.”

### **Concerning Love**

When I first started even thinking about going to seminary I started meeting with

a gentleman who was a retired PCA pastor and at that time in his late 70s and I'd go to Bob Sweet's house and he would always be challenging me about different things. And one thing that he said to me one day, he said to me, "Ralph, are you loving Wendy like Christ loves the church." And I said, "Oh, Bob, I'm trying." "Trying! Trying! Where does it say to try? It says to do it! That's your call is to love your wife as Christ loves the church!" So husbands, let me encourage you - love your wives as Christ loved the church. Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the church. Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the church. Christ loves nothing more than His bride. Christ forsook every blessing and all the riches of heaven for His bride. Christ left the glories of heaven for His bride. He took on flesh for His bride. He was born in a lowly manger for His bride. He was misunderstood and threatened throughout His ministry for His bride. He was arrested and sat quietly through a joke of a trial for His bride. He was beaten, stripped, slapped, spit upon, speared, nailed, pierced, had a crown of thorns shoved on His head for His bride. And husbands, He did it and His death came about by His bride. And yet He still loves His bride. The very people He died for killed Him. We are told here to love our wives like Christ loved the church. Husbands, even when your wife is wrong you are called to love her. Husbands, love your wife like Christ loves the church. I wonder guys, as I was thinking about this, do you really love your wife? Do you check on your wife's well-being more than you check on your brokerage account to see how it's doing? Which do you understand more? Which do you care about more?

### **Concerning Harshness**

Not only are we to love our wives but Paul gives us another word here, doesn't he? He tells us not to be harsh with our wife. Now why do you think Paul would put that in there? Could it maybe be that we as men have a tendency to be harsh with our wives? Men, if you are harsh with your wife let me encourage you tonight to repent. She is your treasure, not your trophy. We would never be careless and reckless and rough on our own treasures. Treasure your wife more than yourself. Now these are always interesting sermons when you get up to preach about submission and when you get up to preach about husbands loving your wives. The first half, you know, you can see the husband making sure his wife is paying attention and sitting up straight, and then once you finish the submission part the wife is quick to hand her pen over to her husband so he can make sure that he's taking good notes as the part comes about how men should love their wives. But here's the truth. And guys, I absolutely guarantee this - if you love your wife like Christ loves the church, she'll be begging for opportunities to show you her submissiveness to you. There is a created order. Follow the role that you were created for.

### **A Word for Children**

So Paul, at this point, slides away from the marriage part and he turns to the

children. He says, "Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord." Verse 20 there. "Children, obey your parents in everything." Here an opportunity for children to model Christ's obedience to the Father. Children, I'll just say this and I'll keep it brief on this point. Obey straight away the first time. You know it's actually quite simple. This verse here doesn't need a lot of exegesis. Children, obey your parents, and when you do, it pleases the Lord. And children, when you don't obey your parents, guess what? It displeases the Lord. Obey your parents straight away the first time. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Children, obey your parents.

### **A Word for Fathers**

And then we get to verse 21. "Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged." Again guys, why do you think Paul's put that in here? Well maybe again because we might have a tendency to be known to provoke our children. I certainly hope you don't do it on purpose but it's a struggle being a parent at times, isn't it?

### **Discouragement, Criticism, Affection, Overprotection, Favoritism**

Let me list a few ways that I think fathers can be guilty of provoking their children. One is discouragement. There are so many people who have grown up thinking that they've never lived up to their dad's standards. I had a guy that worked for me in my office just a couple of weeks ago and he was thanking me because I had told him I appreciated some work that he had been doing. And he said, "That's so good to hear." He said, "I grew up my entire life and my dad let me know that I just wasn't quite good enough." You know that broke my heart. That just broke my heart. So fathers, don't be a discouragement to your children. Another way that we can provoke our children is we can lack affection towards our children. Fathers, I encourage you, especially you with young children, touch your children, love your children, hug your children, kiss your children. Let them know that you truly, truly love them. Another way is, don't provide for his or her needs. You know we live in a society that there's pressure coming left and right all the time. You don't have to meet every want, but fathers, you are expected to provide every need and to do so the best of your ability.

Another way that I think we as fathers need to be careful not to provoke our children is criticism. A psychologist by the name of Dr. Ginott says this, "The child who lives with criticism does not learn responsibility. He learns only to condemn himself and find fault with others. He learns to doubt his own judgment, disparage his own ability, distrust everybody. Above all, he learns to live with continual expectation of impending doom." Now that's no way to live, is it? That's no way we want our children to live. Don't provoke your child with criticism. Create a positive environment in your home. Be it uplifting and be it a place where your children are built up.

Fathers, two more for you. One is overprotection. Overprotection would be no trust, all rules, all deprivation, never allow any liberty, the lines are drawn so narrow and the boxes are so closed that soon your children feel like you do not believe in them at all. That's a hard one for us as fathers. Another one is favoritism. Make sure you're not always, or ever, comparing your children one to the other. "Oh, if you could just be more like Albert things would be so much better. He always does his homework the first time and I never have to get irritated with him." That's just a bad way to go about things around the house. Don't play favorites. Fathers, the reason we don't want to provoke our children is because if we do they will become discouraged Paul tells us here in our text. Don't discourage your children; encourage your children. Don't provoke them; promote them.

### **A Word for Servants**

And then Paul here, at this point, picking up in verse 22, makes a pretty big shift where he is leaving the family, the immediate family, and he starts talking about the relationship between slaves and masters. Now I could spend an hour talking about history of the Roman world and slaves. Let me just tell you this, that slavery, as Paul is talking about here, is not the same as slavery that we may think of in the South in the 1800s. Often these are willing relationships that people have come into; they're often with pay, sometimes even the slaves would have people that would work for them. These slaves would have great responsibilities running houses, running businesses. What we really have here, closest probably that we could compare this relationship to, is maybe an employer, employee relationship. So with that being said, let's kind of think along those lines a little bit. "Slaves, 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." It's a word to us as workers that we as Christian workers need to work hard. We don't work hard to be eye-pleasers, as Paul puts here, but we work hard to please the Lord for we are working for the Lord every time we go and do our jobs. So as Christians, we hear that term "Christian work ethic" - that's what we should keep in mind. When we are out working we are representing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ even as we go into the workplace and we should be encouraged to work well for the Lord.

### **A Stewardship from the Lord**

And then he ends this section by saying, "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." For any of you that ever manage people or run a business or anything like that, there's a word to you there, and that is, to be fair, to be fair to your employees and to treat them well. They are given to you by the Lord for a season. You are a steward of them and you should treat them well. And that's a word that I think we all can keep in mind

and that we need to remember.

## **A Call to Christ-Like Living**

And this text that's before us this evening implores us to live lives worthy of our callings. And we started here talking about verse 1 of chapter 3 where we're reminded that we've been raised with Christ. Being Christian families should be different looking than being families of the world. We think of others better than ourselves by living lives like this. And what we're actually doing is we're modeling the very work of Jesus. For in Jesus, we see submission and love and obedience and respect and proper care for others. Jesus came to fix broken relationships. Maybe tonight you're looking at your heart and you're thinking, "I could be a better wife, husband, child, father, employee, employer. Whatever it is, I encourage you to consider what this passage is saying to you. And the reason I know that Jesus came to fix broken relationships is because the ultimate relationship that He fixed was the relationship of sinful man to a holy God. If He can fix your relationship with the Heavenly Father, He can fix your relationship with anyone. Will you let Him? Will you ask Him to? Let's pray together.

*Father God, thank you for this quick look at Your Word tonight. Lord, it's a humbling passage. I doubt there's a person in this room that says, "Oh yeah, I do that just right every day." Lord, we pray that through the work of Your Spirit that we'll grow in grace, that we'll be the wives and husbands and children and fathers and employees and employers that You've called us to be, that as we live our lives that we will represent Jesus Christ and His work in our lives and that we can tell others that Jesus Christ has come to fix broken relationships. And we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.*

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