

The Christian Society

Scripture: Colossians 3:18-4:1

Introduction

Well, we are almost finished with the letter to the Colossians. In this section of the letter, Paul shifted his focus from the false teaching in the church toward the Colossians living in such a way that matched their new identity in Christ. Earlier, Paul wrote that “if” you are Christians “then” live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Paul urged the Colossians to put off their old self – those habits that are not Christ like. Doing the right things, however, does not make one right before God; but it is evidence of a right relationship with Him. Jesus said that a good tree bears good fruit. If we are God’s tree, if He has planted us with the seed of His Word and watered us with the blood of His Son, and He causes us to grow with His Holy Spirit, then we should expect to bear good fruit. There will be evidence of spiritual growth. If we have repented of our sin and have turned to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, there will be evidence of God’s presence in our lives.

And so Paul wrote that we should “put to death” those things that are sinful. A. W. Tozer called it that birthday present you received from Satan. It is the worldly nature that is a result of our sin that separates us from our holy God and leads us to do all sorts of evil things. Paul listed some of these “worldly things” that we ought to put to death and then he listed what we should be doing. Paul ended that section with the following verse:

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So, whatever we do, we ought to do it in the name of Jesus Christ. We should do everything according to God’s will and under the authority of Jesus Christ. Let me repeat this: everything we do, every event we have, every donation we receive, every money we spend, ought to be done according to God’s will and under the authority of Jesus Christ. If what we do or plan to do is not according to God’s will, is not under the authority of Jesus Christ, does not bring glory to our heavenly Father, and does not advance the good news of Jesus Christ, then we have no business doing it.

And so today, Paul continued that line of thought and applied it to our relationships with each other, addressing three primary ones. A Christian’s commitment to Christ affects every area of life. Just as we should do everything according to God’s will and under the authority of Christ, our relationships in marriage, in the family, and in the workplace should honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In this section of the letter, Paul gave instructions for the various groups in the Church – wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters. Therefore, I have defined the three sections of today’s passage as follows:

- Christ in the Marriage
- Christ in the Family
- Christ in the Work Place

I believe the order of the text is significant. The text moves logically from marriage to family and then to extended family concerns.

Christ in the Marriage

I titled this message “The Christian Society,” which may sound strange since two of the three points have to do with family. Well, the reason for this is that society begins with the family. Strong families are a benefit to society, and the foundation of society is marriage. The very first human institution God created was marriage. God made the first man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. But, because it was not good for man to be alone, God fashioned the second human out of the first man – bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh, and she was called “women” because she was taken out of man. And God said the following:

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

God created the first humans and He brought them together in the first human union – marriage. Marriage should, therefore, be held in honor and the married couple should represent the love and devotion of Christ and the Church. All of this sounds great!

Paul then began this section of the letter by writing, “Wives, submit to your husbands.” Before some of you think Paul has a problem with women, the Apostle Peter also said something very similar. It was not just Paul. That word “submit” gets a lot of attention, particularly in Southern Baptist life. In each of the three groups of people Paul mentioned (Wives/Husbands, Children/Parents, and Servants/Masters), the first one submits to the other. God certainly spoke of submission, and expects it, and I do believe it is still relevant today. I do not think it is from some ancient Jewish culture that oppressed women, as some are in favor of believing. If that were true, the Bible would have no authority since at any place where the culture differs with express commands of Scripture, whether it is this issue or some other, the Bible will be secondary to culture. But we should try to understand what “submission” is and what it is not.

The word “submit” is used many times in the New Testament. It may describe Christ’s submission to God, church members to one another, believers in exercising their prophetic gifts, or like here, the order in marriage. There are a couple of things to note about Paul’s use of the word. It refers to wives submitting voluntarily. It also does not suggest slavery or servitude, and never calls for the husband to make his wife submit. Good luck with any of you men who try to do that! Besides, Paul addressed the wives here, not the husbands. The motivation for voluntary submission is that it is a proper Christian attitude, indicated by the phrase “as is fitting in the Lord.” Voluntarily taking a position of submission is a matter of a wife’s relationship to God, not to her husband. It is “fitting in the Lord.” Also, a wife’s submission has nothing to do with her personal worth or saying she is inferior, no more than we can say Christ, who also submitted, is inferior to the Father. It simply is not true. Lastly, what Paul described here reflects God’s plan for families on this earth. It does not speak of our eternal condition.

But let’s look at what Scripture says of the husband’s duty. Paul wrote for the husbands to love their wives and to not be harsh to with them. Which is harder to do, to submit to someone or to love someone? Well, I guess that depends on the type of love we are talking about. To the Ephesians, Paul explained the measure by which husbands are to love their wives:

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

That is a pretty high standard. Men, if we want to be the head of the household, then we need to really understand the responsibility we have to our wives. The biblical model of leadership is that of a servant. Just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her, so too, husbands are to love their wives and sacrificially serve them. I am preaching to myself, for I am still learning this and I am a long way from being the person I ought to be. In the marriage, a husband's loving, caring, sacrificial approach to his wife's well-being should make her responsibility of submission easier. If a husband fails to love his wife, she could say to her husband, "Sure, I will submit to you, but you are the one who will be held accountable for this. Go right ahead." I am not saying that any wife has said that! While Paul mentioned the wife's submission to the husband, notice, he did not say the husband's duty to rule the wife. The husband's duty is to love his wife, not govern her. The leadership God gives the husband is one of servant leadership that should be modeled after Christ. Men love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. When you think your wife is being difficult, think about how difficult we all are to Jesus Christ, and yet, He still loves us.

Christ in the Family

The second group Paul addressed in this passage was children and parents. Paul wrote that children ought to obey their parents. This is a stronger word than "submit" used of wives earlier. Paul reinforced this by the phrase "in everything." So, in all things, children are to obey their parents. Children have a responsibility in the Christian family order. To be pleasing to God, they are to obey their parents. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote that a children's obedience to their parents is related to the fifth commandment:

Exodus 20:12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

God commanded us to honor our earthly fathers and mothers. The command for children to obey their parents does not include immoral things or things contrary to what God expects. Paul mentioned that obeying your parents "pleases the Lord." Well, obviously disobeying God in order to obey your parents would not please Him. Obedience is not blind obedience but should always be in accordance to the will of God.

While he stated the children ought to obey their parents, meaning both mom and dad, Paul singled out the fathers in how they raise their children. Paul may be addressing both father and mother, but the fact that he addressed only the fathers served to remind us that the fathers bore a primary responsibility for the children in the home. While God has designed the family to have both mothers and fathers, God again has given the fathers the responsibility of leading the family. Perhaps, a reason God addressed the fathers here is because, like with their wives, men can misuse their place in the home and mistreat the family. A father's role in the family is vitally important to the family and the well-being of the children. The type of relationship a child has with his or her father can influence the kind of relationship that child has with God. It can influence our view of our heavenly Father. Men ought to be an example of Christ not only to their wives, but also to their children.

Paul wrote that fathers ought not “provoke” or “embitter” their children, meaning to cause them to have feelings of resentment. Parents can embitter children by constantly picking at them, by refusing to acknowledge their efforts, and by telling them they were not good enough. This kind of behavior has no place in the Christian home. When parents need to correct their children, and they should, it should be toward the child’s behavior and not the child’s personhood. Parents are to avoid this because it will discourage their children. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote that fathers should raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If you want to help your community, if you want to contribute to it, then raise up your children to fear the Lord. Discipline them and instruct them in the ways of Christ. It is the parents’ God given responsibility to nurture the lives God has entrusted to them and to raise them up to know and fear the Lord. The family is a spiritual unit and a training ground for mature adult character. Men ought to lead their families by being examples of Christ.

Christ in the Workplace

The third area of society that Paul mentioned in this passage was in the workplace. Specifically, Paul was addressing involuntary servitude, or slavery. Some translations may render the word at the beginning of verse twenty-two as “slave”, “servant”, or “bondservant.” The underlying term here can mean any of these depending on the context. In Old Testament times, one might enter slavery either voluntarily, such as to escape poverty or to pay off a debt, or involuntarily, for instance by birth, by being captured in battle, or by a judicial sentence. In New Testament times, the word is often best described as a “bondservant.” This would be someone bound to serve a master for a specific period of time, but also someone who might own property, gain wealth and status in society, and even be released or purchase his freedom.

We should recognize that Paul neither condoned nor condemned this system of servitude. He instead provided instructions to believing masters and slaves regarding their relationship to each other in the Lord. Some believe that the instruction Paul provided sows the seeds for the eventual dismantling of slavery. There would have been many slaves (or bondservants) at Colossae. Paul treated them with dignity and appealed to them directly to honor Christ in their situation. Slaves (or bondservants) should work heartily, not primarily to please their earthly masters but as if they were working for the Lord. It would be natural for Christian bondservants to despise their earthly masters in the name of their heavenly one; however, Paul reminded them that fulfilling one’s earthly obligations is, in fact, service to the Lord.

The principles he stated in this passage regarding servants and masters apply to employees and employers today. Employees ought to work “with all their heart,” as for the Lord and not for men. You are serving Jesus. You work for God. When you are mistreated in the workplace, just remember that you are really working for God. So, Paul commanded servants to obey their masters, their employers. The exception to this, of course, would be if our employers required us to disobey God’s Word or to compromise our commitment to Christ. We see this happening now with the government requiring employers to do things that go against their conscience or violate their sacred beliefs. As long as our earthly masters do not require us to disobey God or violate our Christian duty, we are to obey them. And employers are to treat their employees justly and fairly, knowing they also have a Master in heaven.

Conclusion

In closing, just as we should do everything according to God's will and in subjection to the authority of Christ, our relationships in marriage, in the family, and in the workplace should honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our commitment to Christ affects every area of life. In this section of Paul's letter to the Colossians, Paul gave instructions for the various groups in the Church – wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters. In each of these relationships, Paul reminded us that we have a duty to live out our Christian faith, to represent Christ well, and in all things bring glory to Him. Once we turn from that old self, and turn to Christ and the new self, we begin a new life, a different life, one that is marked by a commitment to Jesus Christ in all things, whether that is submitting to another, loving one another, and obeying those in authority over us. Christ is all and in all. May we as His people live radically different lives that draw attention to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!