

The Christoform Household

Colossians 3:18-4:1

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. My name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or visitor, welcome. We're glad that you're here. And I would just reiterate that if you have opportunity to talk with Nate or any of his students after the service, you should take advantage of that. RUF is one of the best things that the PCA does, and they're doing great work in Lynchburg and at other campuses around the commonwealth. And if you don't have opportunity to talk with Nate or his students today, you can talk to Jason Little. He's the area coordinator over RUF. You can talk to me. I'm the committee chairman for our presbytery. We really like RUF around here. So, we'd be happy to sing its praise to you.

But this morning, we are returning to our series in the book of Colossians. So, we took a break last week from Colossians and spent some time in Psalm 139, but we're returning to Colossians 3. So, if you have a Bible, you can turn to Colossians 3. We also project the passage on the screen, so you'll be able to follow along there. And from a few weeks ago, if you're with us, you'll remember that we encountered a section of Colossians where Paul was calling us to flee from the vices of this world and to pursue the virtues of God's kingdom. He was talking about us putting off sin and putting off vice and putting on godliness and beauty and truth. You remember Tobias used the illustration of spandex or lycra and how hard it is to take off, right? Like, that's sin. It's hard to remove. And we do this, right? We take it off and we put on virtue through God's grace, through his strength, through his ability, through his work in us. But as we think about virtue and vice and as we're coming out of that section, it's easy to just leave those ideas in kind of the theoretical, in the general, right? Sometimes it can be hard to know how to apply God's word and how it takes root in our lives and how it plays out in our lives.

Well, this morning in our passage, Paul's going to get a little specific. He's going to get a little specific because he's going to start talking about the household. And he's going to talk about our relationships, husbands to wives and parents to children and masters to servants. And as I was thinking about this passage this week, the voice of this elderly man from my church in St. Louis was running through my head. Before my wife and I moved here to Roanoke, we were in St. Louis serving at a church there, and there was an elderly man. His name was Roger. Roger was a retired pastor who actually grew up in the Commonwealth of Virginia but made his way to St. Louis. And every once in a while after a sermon that maybe convicted him, maybe pricked his heart, you know, maybe was a little too close to home, he would come up to one of the pastors who was preaching and say, "Boy, you stopped preaching and you started meddling this morning." And I couldn't help but think that if Roger was reading this passage from Colossians, he might think, *Boy, Paul, you're starting to meddle* because Paul's going to talk about our home lives. He's going to talk about our relationships, about husbands and wives, about children and parents, about masters and servants. And what we're going to see is that God's Word isn't just sage advice. It isn't an interesting idea. It's not just suggestions. But God's Word is supposed to influence every aspect of our lives, and it's supposed to reorient us around what is true and what is good and what is beautiful, even in our homes. So let's go ahead and read Colossians 3, beginning in verse 18. Paul writes,

“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. 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. 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 bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we ask that as we come to your word that you would lead us, you would guide us, that you would direct our ways. Father, we need your help. Apart from your work, we would be blind to your truth, and we would turn from your goodness, and we need you to turn us back to you. Open our eyes, unplug our ears, soften our hearts. We pray all this in Christ's name, amen.

So, a couple weeks ago, my family and I were re-watching that amazing courtroom drama, *A Few Good Men*. *A Few Good Men* is this wonderful story about two marines who have been accused of murdering a fellow marine. This death actually was an accident. It wasn't intended to occur, but it was an accident that happened as the marines were seeking to discipline this other marine because he went outside the chain of command. And there are lots of great lines from this movie, right? I'm not going to try and do Jack Nicholson, but there's this one scene in particular that struck me again when I was watching it. And it's this scene with Lance Corporal Dawson. Lance Corporal Dawson is one of the marines who has been accused of murder. He's on trial, and he speaks about his adherence to the code. And when asked what the code was, he said, “Unit, corps, God, country.” Unit, corps, God, country. And what he meant by this was that this code was to orient his entire life. Everything that he did and everything a marine was expected to do was filtered through this code. So much so that when Lance Corporal Dawson was offered the opportunity to take a plea deal and get out of jail in six months, he said this: “We joined the marines because we wanted to live our lives by a certain code, and we found it in the corps. Now you're asking us to sign a piece of paper that says we have no honor. You're asking us to say we're not marines. If a court decided that what we did was wrong, then I'll accept whatever punishment they give. But I believe I was right, sir. I believe I did my job, and I will not dishonor myself, my unit, or the corps so I can go home in six months, sir.” It's this incredibly powerful scene. It's this incredible scene where he is declaring that he cannot, he will not act in such a way, even when it's advantageous for him to, he will not act in such a way that breaks the code. Because the code informed everything and every aspect of his life.

The Centrality of Christ

And the same is true of the Christian. Our lives are built around a code, if you will. It's the code that we belong to Jesus. It's the code of what we heard in the verses in our previous section. Our previous section ended with Paul saying, “whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Do everything in the name of the Lord. Not just Sunday things, not just Bible reading things, not just praying things. Everything, every aspect of our lives is to be oriented around the centrality of Jesus, even our relationships. And that's

the first thing I want us to see. Before we start to dive into the specifics of these relationships, I want us to see that at the core of these relationships is the centrality of Christ. And we see how often Jesus shows up as he talks about these relationships, right? That in every relationship he invokes Jesus. We see it in verses 18, 20, 22, 23, twice in verse 24 and in chapter 4 verse 1. He invokes the name of the Lord. And what does he say? He says that our behavior is to be formed by our relationship with the Lord. That we are to live as is fitting to the Lord. That we are to please the Lord. That we are to fear the Lord. That we are to work for the Lord. That we are to know what we receive comes from the Lord. That we are to serve the Lord. And that we are to remember that the Lord is the maker, the master who is in heaven. And so before anything else, before we get into specifics, before we look at these relationships, we must recognize that every one of our relationships, regardless of who we are in that relationship, must be centered on Christ. He is our foundation. He is the center. He is the one who orients and dictates the manner of our relationships and how they are to be lived out, not us. He is the Lord, not us. We don't set the terms for how we relate to our spouse, or to our children, or to our parents, or to our superiors. No. No, Christ does. He is central to every relationship.

A Mutual Esteem

And flowing out of that, our relationships are to be marked by mutual esteem. Now this idea that regardless of position, whether you are a husband or a wife, a child or a parent, a master or a servant, this idea that every person has dignity and value and esteem, that's not strange to us. That's not foreign to us. In fact, if anything, we live in a time that prizes it so greatly that we have removed any sort of distinction at all, which is, you know, a problem in of itself. But that's another sermon. No. No, this idea, it's not foreign to us. However, what is common for us was actually very uncommon to Paul's original hearers. You see, in Paul's day, in his cultural context, wives and bondservants were property. And children were only valued if they brought honor to the family, if only they had utility. And so what we see is that Paul is actually turning the cultural appropriation of his day on its head. When he says, husbands, love your wives, fathers, don't provoke your children, masters, treat your servants justly, like this would have been crazy to his hearers. He's introducing an entirely new ethic to them. We take it for granted, but it was not the norm of Paul's day. And we take it for granted because of how much Christian ethics have actually influenced our world.

The historian, Tom Holland, (not Spider-Man - Tom Holland the historian, who's not a Christian) he wrote, "Paul's letters and the gospels are the most influential, the most impactful, and the most revolutionary writings that have emerged from the ancient world." We take them for granted that people have value and dignity, but we take it for granted because God's Word, His ethic, has taken root in His people and has influenced the culture at large so that our culture is actually borrowing from our ethic. And that's a good thing. We should be thankful for that. And we should see that Paul is changing the norm by which husbands and fathers and masters related to their wives and children and servants. Because now the way that we are to interact with one another is to be marked by love and encouragement, justice and mutual esteem. Okay, so how does this play out then? If this is now how we are to live, if this is how it is supposed to be manifest in our relationship, how does it look? What does it look like?

Well, Paul says, wives submit to your husbands and husbands love your wives. Now, when Paul says, wives submit to your husbands, this does not mean that women by their very nature are less important. Okay, that is not what it means. In fact, the biblical understanding

of humanity is that men and women are both made in the image of God, both deserving value and worth and dignity. We heard it in our Old Testament reading this morning, right? We hear it in Genesis 1 that God has made man and woman both in His image. Also, we know that women featured very prominently in the ministry of Jesus. They were some of His earliest followers. Women are the ones who discovered the empty tomb. And women were the first proclaimers of the resurrection. Also, just read Paul, especially the end of Paul's letters, like the end of Romans, and we see women all over the place serving and ministering and engaging in kingdom advancing work. And so, when Paul talks about submission, he is not talking about worth or value. He is also not talking about women universally submitting to men universally, without distinction. He is talking about a single relationship. And he is speaking about specific relationship in order to give order to the home. You see, Paul grounds this in Christ, as is fitting in the Lord. Fitting in the Lord.

So, that means that the way of Christ is to orient the life of the home for the wife, as well as for the husband. Now listen, this doesn't mean that husbands have absolute authority. It doesn't mean that husbands can treat their wives any way that they want. No. No. In fact, all of us have an ultimate authority, and that is Jesus. And so, if a husband was ever to encourage a wife to do something that was sinful, contrary to the ethic of God's kingdom, to turn away from the Lord, the wife has a greater obligation to obey the Lord than her husband. We all are to have greater allegiance to the Lord. And husbands are not to rule over their wives. Instead, husbands are to love their wives. To love their wives. Now, Paul here in Colossians doesn't expound on what that looks like, but we know in Ephesians 5 he does. Where Paul defines what this love of wife is going to look like when he says that it is like the love of Christ for his church. And that love was a love of sacrifice. It was a love of sacrifice. That's how husbands are to love their wives, by sacrificing for them. C.S. Lewis, in his wonderful book, *The Four Loves*, when talking about the relationship between a husband and a wife, he says of the husband that his relationship with his wife is to be like a crucifixion, whose wife receives most and gives least. Because that's what we receive from Christ. That is the love of Christ that he gave of himself for the sake of the church. That's how husbands are supposed to love their wives.

It's embodying 1 Corinthians 13 that says love not insists on its own way. Not, I'm the husband, we must do what I desire. No, love does not insist on its own way. Love sacrifices. Love gives of itself. Love serves. And so what this means, what Paul is telling us, is that the relationship between a husband and a wife is to be one in which we prioritize the other over every other relationship we encounter. And y'all, that is not controversial. I realize that. If you go talk to a counselor, any marriage counselor worth their salt, they will tell you the same thing. You have to prioritize your marriage if you want it to be good, right? Y'all know this. And yet I wonder, if we were to look through our text messages and our phone histories, I wonder if we would see that we are talking to our parents or our children or our siblings more than we are our spouse. I wonder, married couples, if we are looking to our mother or our father before our husband or our wife. I wonder if we stand by our spouse or do we stand by our children or our parents. I have a friend who he was telling me not too long ago that there are times when his children will try to pit mom against dad. Like, y'all have seen this, right? When you were children, you did it. And children, you do do it, right? You do it all the time. So, sometimes his adult children will try to do this, right? Mom will say something. They maybe didn't really like it, so they go to dad. And dad always says to them, "Hey, I just want to let you know I'm always on her side." Now, there are times where he might go after the fact or it gets reversed and she'll come after the fact and be like, I think maybe they got a point here and maybe we should talk about a little bit more. But the point is, is that he's

always with her. He's always going to have her back over and against everyone else. I love that. I think that's beautiful. That is loving your wife. That is having a family in which husband and wife are prioritizing one another.

And so, I wonder, I wonder for the rest of us, if it is evident that our spouse is our priority over everyone else. Mutual esteem between husband and wife. But this mutual esteem is also between parent and child, right? Paul says, "children, obey your parents." Fathers, encourage your children or adults, do not provoke them. No, kids, I just want you to know. I understand that when you're like 14, your parents do not understand you and the world is different and that angst is going to take on a whole new kind of life of its own in your life and that you're going to push against parental authority. I get it. I, too, listened to Linkin Park when I was younger, okay? Teenage angst seems to be just a common part of growing up and it has become commonly accepted in our world. And yes, you are to grow and mature and take on more personal responsibility and not depend upon your parents as you continue to grow and mature. And yet, rebellion and outright disregarding of your parents' direction is not the way it's supposed to be. It's just not. I get it. They don't understand you. You know what? They really don't sometimes. That is true.

And you know what? They really do a lot of the time. Paul said, it pleases the Lord when you obey your parents. Man, isn't that a beautiful thing? Like, don't we all want to please the Lord to have the Lord look upon us with a smile? It pleases the Lord. Now, again, I have to throw out the caveat, right? Your ultimate allegiance is to the Lord, so if your parent is calling you to sin, to disregard the Lord, you're not supposed to obey that. However, assuming all things being true, all things being equal, that they're encouraging your walk with the Lord, it pleases God when you obey them. And then Paul says, fathers, encourage your children. Care for them. Don't provoke them. Now, pretty much every commentary is unified that not provoking is speaking of the father or the mother who is severe with their parenting. Severe with their parenting. Okay, now maybe some of us have heard the parenting method that we have to break the will of the child to obey us. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands of people who have said that because my hand would go up. I remember thinking that's what five-year-old, that's what I have to do. I have to make sure that they're going to obey, and yet as I was thinking about this passage, I realized that yes, children are to obey their parents. The parents are the ones who set the terms of the relationship, who orient our family, and yet we're not called to break their will. We're called to steward their humanity.

If you're a parent now or one day you will be, there's a good chance you're going to have a child very different from you, and you could spend all your time finding their faults and trying to make them into your own image, or we could harness their excitement and their energy and their uniqueness towards the Lord. Now, that isn't easy, especially when we see our children starting to look more and more like us, and seeing our sins and our faults being manifest in them, and yet parents, we are called to shepherd our children, not provoke them, to direct them in the ways of the Lord, and children, you are called to obey your parents, that there is a mutual esteem, a mutual esteem between husband and wife, a mutual esteem between parent and child, and Paul concludes with a mutual esteem between masters and bondservants. Now, I will just say it is very common amongst pastors and theologians that when we get to any discussion about masters and bondservants to run to the modern workplace, and I get that tendency, and there is appropriate application here, okay, so we'll get to that in a second. However, before moving to that appropriate application, we have to acknowledge this is not the exact same as the boss-employee dynamic that we experience. There is difference here, because bondservants were slaves. Many translations translate it that

way. The ESV, when it was first translated, translated it that way, but over time, they changed the translation to bondservant, and the reason is, is because as soon as we hear slave, our minds go to the American slave trade, right? It goes to that part of our history, but slave in the ancient world, in Paul's time, wasn't the same as slave in the American colonies, okay? Slavery in ancient times, in Paul's times, was oftentimes brought about by war, or by a debt that was incurred, or someone would sell themselves into slavery so they would have a place to protect them, that they would actually have provision then, and so slavery wasn't the same as it was in America. It wasn't based on race or ethnicity. It was oftentimes financial, and what Paul is saying is that the bondservant and the master, their lives are to be dictated by the Lord, that the bondservant, as he works, does so not for the praise of their master, not for the praise of the employer, but unto the Lord. He is the one who watches over their labor, and what's amazing is Paul says that the bondservant shares in the same inheritance as the master. Y'all, that would have blown their mind. That would have been, that would have been crazy to them, that the bondservant was going to share in the benefits of Christ just as their master does, and the reason that they share in that inheritance is because the masters, they too live under the rule of another. You see, they are to know that the Lord is over everyone, over the master, over the servant, over you and me, and so now we see how this can apply to us, don't we? That regardless of what you're called to labor at, we do so not for the acclaim of others, not for our employer, but for the Lord, and whoever we, whoever may have people in our charge, we lead and we direct and we supervise, remembering that we too serve a master, and that's the reality we all live with. Regardless of your relationship, regardless of your situation, regardless of your circumstance, we are all living under the authority and eye and rule of Jesus. He is the one who directs our ways. He is the one who leads us with love. He is the one who treats us justly and with care, and his life informs every part of our lives, and so regardless of who you are, whether you are a wife, a parent, or a child, whether you are a master or a servant, we are to live by that code, that we do all things for the glory of Christ. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you. We thank you that you are the ruler over all, that you are the ruler over our relationships, you are the ruler over our lives, you are the ruler over this world, and so we pray, Father, that you would help us to live in such a way that you are central in our relationships, that we would love and care for one another, that we would have esteem for one another, and that we would live in such a way that gives you glory. Father, we ask that you would help us to do this, and we pray all this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.