November 5/6, 2022

In Christ at Home, Work and Beyond

Rooted in Christ Series

Colossians 3:18-4:1

Pastor Bryan Clark

Let's just say back in the day when I was going to school, math and *me* were not the best of friends. Part of it was I just didn't have any interest in it. But part of it was with my classmates trying to figure out, "Why do I need to know this? When in life am I ever going to use this?" Well, I think that's how a lot of people think of theology and Bible doctrine. You know, we go to church; we hear all this stuff, and then you walk away thinking, "Okay, but what is the relevance of this to everyday life?" Well, that's a really good question, and I think that's the question Paul is addressing. "You want practical? I'll give you practical," and that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Colossians, chapter three. If you're visiting with us, we're working our way through the book of Colossians. We find ourselves in chapter 3.

Jeff finished up last week with verse 17: **Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus.** You can almost imagine the Colossian believers saying, "Okay, but that's so general. What does that mean practically speaking?" To which Paul responds, "Okay, wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves, masters…" It's as practical as it gets—everyday life in the trenches. Verse 18:

> **Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.** (*NASB, Colossians 3:18)

Most of these ancient cultures, certainly the Roman culture, had what we refer to as household codes. They were just the expectations of how things were to be done at home. In the Roman Empire, it was all about order. They did believe, "As the family goes, so goes the Empire." As long as there's order at home, there's going to be order in the empire. So they had very strict household codes. Paul is now going to infuse into those codes, "This is how it's now going to look differently, now that you have new life in Christ." So when the text says **…as is fitting**, it's probably referring to Roman language that this is the household code. This is fitting; this is how you're supposed to conduct yourself. But he's changing it, this is now **…as is fitting in the Lord**.

In order to understand this, you have to go all the way back to the beginning, and a quick flyover is just a reminder: God invented marriage. Marriage is not some adaptation through evolution, for the survival of the species. Marriage was intended and designed by God for a very specific reason. Genesis tells us God created humankind male and female. One of the interesting parts of that conversation is the fact that God did not create male and female the same way or at the exact same moment. He created Adam out of the dust of the ground. He created Eve out of Adam. He created Adam first, and then later Eve, now equal in every way. It has nothing to do with that. But you have to wrestle with the reality that God made male and female differently, because they have different roles. Ultimately the purpose was that the husband and wife would picture the ultimate love story between God and His people, or in the New Testament, between Christ and His Church. It's a beautiful picture of the ultimate love story.

But there's a problem. The problem shows up in Genesis chapter 3, when Adam and Eve sin, when we experience what we call *the fall*, and as a result of that, there are consequences, and interestingly enough, one of the consequences that God talks about is how this beautiful love story at home is now going to turn into a battleground, and there is going to be competition instead of completion, and rather than this beautiful love story, the struggle is going to be for power. So all the way through history, you have this terrible struggle between men and women in the culture, in homes, that creates all these difficulties, all these hurts. That's why people have such strong reactions when you begin to talk about biblical roles at home because there is a long history of hurt. We could probably have no shortage of people in the auditorium that would share stories of things that happened at home for you that were so hurtful. But what Paul is saying is, "Now, as a result of new life, you've been transformed by the power of Jesus, and we have the opportunity to recapture what God intended at home—once again picturing this beautiful love story at home. That is a picture of the ultimate love story. So, when he says **…as is fitting in the Lord**, it's now back to God's original plan and intent. That's what he means by that.

He opens with the words, **"Wives, be subject to your husbands**." **Subject** is a Greek word that's primarily a military term, that just means *to arrange under.* Now I realize this is terribly popular in our culture today *(laughter),* but just hang in there with me, because there's no reason to make this something other than what it is. The reality is we all submit every day in dozens of ways. There's virtually no way for a civil society to function without submission. We submit to the traffic laws; we submit at work; we submit at school. I mean, think about it. You can't just go into a store and take everything you want and go home. There are laws, there are rules. We submit to that all day, every day, and it just makes sense to us because it's necessary in order to function in an orderly way in a culture. Why would we be so offended that it's the same way at home? The core idea is, "This is no longer a competition. It's not a power struggle. It's a love story." So a wife has to be willing to partner with her husband for this to work. Now what Paul says about wives would not have been radical in a Roman culture. What he says next about husbands would have been totally radical. Verse 19:

Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

It would be easy to read over that and see no big story here today. But to understand, according to the Roman household codes, a wife was little more than a piece of property. She had few if any rights. A marriage was not based on love. There was no expectation a husband would love his wife. It was practical; it was functional, and that's how it was carried out. As a matter of fact, Douglas Mo, who is a New Testament scholar, says we have no record of any ancient household code where a husband is ever required to love his wife. It just was not the way it was done. So this is pretty radical stuff, when all of a sudden Paul comes along and says we're not going to do it that way anymore. As a matter of fact, the word for **love** is the strongest Greek word for love. It is *agape*. This isn't romantic love. This isn't a feeling love. This is a self-sacrificing, a selfless love, where I choose to think of someone else as more important than myself. For Paul to radically call these men who had all the power to radically change, to sacrifice themselves for the good of their wives would have been unheard of in a Roman culture. Some people today say the Bible is misogynistic. The only way you can make that claim is you don't understand the ancient world, and you have no idea what the Bible teaches, because the reality is women in the first century would have risen up and praised Paul as a hero to women, because for the first time, they were

given value and worth, and were expected to be treated that way. So, you go back through the book of Colossians and look at all the descriptions of this beautiful relationship of what God has done for us as sinners, as He has saved us and made us right and made us whole, and you have this beautiful love story between Christ and the church. This is now to be applied at home in such a way that the relationship between the husband and wife rightly pictures that love story for their kids, and for the people around them.

The second couplet: children and parents, verse 20:

> **Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.**

Now again, this would not have been unusual; it wouldn't have been radical. But one of the things that is interesting in a culture that so devalued women and so devalued children, is that the expectation is that the congregation is going to hear this letter read to them. In the first century, they didn't have Bibles. They had a letter, and it was read to the congregation. The expectation through this is that husbands, wives, parents, and children are all part of that congregation, and Paul is speaking *to* the children, not to the parents to "talk to your children". Again, it was pretty unheard of in a Roman culture to so value these children that he's talking *to* them. And essentially what he's saying is: Even if you're 8, 9, or 10 years old, if you have trusted Jesus as Savior, you have been radically transformed. You have new life. You are in Christ. You're filled with the fullness of Christ. You are every bit as glorious as the most spiritually mature person in the room. And with that comes the expectation, even as children, that you seek to rightly represent Jesus at home.

It is interesting as you go through the New Testament, there are several passages that basically talk about the breakdown of culture in the last days, and then there's a list of what you can expect to see. For example, Romans 1 has it; 2nd Timothy 3 has it and, in those lists it always includes being disobedient to parents. Once kids will no longer listen to their parents, they're probably not going to listen to anyone in authority, and that's the beginning of the breakdown of a culture. So, *Children, obey your parents.* Verse 21:

> **Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.**

This again, would have been radical. It's easy just to read through these and not really understand what's happening here. The father ran the household. He had basically no real accountability unless there was disorder in the family. A father could do anything he wanted to his children… anything! A father could beat his children, which was commonly done in Roman homes. A father could sell his children into slavery if he needed the money. A father could imprison his children. A father could put his children in chains. A father could kill his children with no accountability. So, to come back and say to these fathers, "We're not going to do it that way anymore," was very radical.

To **exasperate your children** basically had the idea of challenging them, oppressing them in such a way that one of two things would happen. One is they would lose heart. You break them, they

roll over, they give up, and that's what the text says. The other is they have had enough, and they bow their neck, and they decide they're going to fight back. Rebellion! Either way, it's a disaster.

So the idea is, go back and read Colossians chapters 1 and 2, and look at all the ways that God the Father is pictured as loving His children, as caring for His children, as redeeming His children. And for those of us that are fathers, the responsibility is to rightly represent that Father at home. I should be able to say to my kids in everything that I do, in our conversations and how I treat them, to be able to say to them, "Just watch me if you want to know how your heavenly Father treats us." So that was a radical change in these homes—that the father would so love his children.

Starting in verse 22 then, we get into slaves and masters. The most obvious application for us would be work, as employers and employees. But just a quick word about that. Again, the critics would say the Bible is pro slavery. The only way you can say that is, you don't understand the ancient world, and you don't know what the Bible says, because the reality is slavery was a way of life in the ancient world. It's not the way God intended it to be. It's not what God wants. It's the result of the fall. But it was nothing like what we think of as slavery a couple of hundred years ago in our country. The best way to understand it is to realize that when one nation conquered another nation, which was common in the ancient world, you had two options. You could either slaughter everybody, or you could enslave them. Those were the only two options. So, slavery was by far the most humane option. You bring them back, and they become slaves as part of the society. It was just an accepted way of life. As a matter of fact, if you were to walk down the street in these Roman cities, roughly fifty percent of every person you would meet was a slave. They were professionals; they were doctors; they were teachers; they were craftsmen; they were laborers. And while it seems odd to us, the reason they're included in the household codes is because they were also domestic slaves that were considered just part of the family. So that's what he's talking about here. Verse 22:

> **Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.** (Vs. 22-24)

Now, just a couple of things here. It would have been virtually impossible for a little group of fledgling Christians to rise up and overturn the Roman Empire. As a matter of fact, that kind of rebellion would have cost them their lives. Rather, there was just a realization of, "How do you live in Christ in Colossae, such as it is, at that time, in the Roman Empire?" And the answer was to be a really good slave, to be responsible, to work hard, to do your job, because you do have an earthly master. That was just the reality of the day. But when it goes on and talks about ultimately **fearing the Lord**, meaning *respecting the Lord*, and it goes on to say, ultimately, who you serve **is the Lord**, it's a play on words that's lost in the English translation. The word **master**, the word, **Lord**, it's the same Greek word. You have a Master in heaven; you have a master on earth. So you need to work really hard to do what you need to do to be a responsible worker for your earthly master, remembering at the end of the day, the one you're actually serving is your heavenly Master. So even though your earthly master isn't watching—he doesn't know what you're doing, and he doesn't see when you cut corners, or you're lazy or you don't do your job—your heavenly Master knows. And that's ultimately who you're working for. That's who you're representing.

What's interesting about that is verse 24, when it talks about receiving **a reward of the inheritance**. These slaves were not treated fairly. Even with Christian masters, there were all kinds of issues. Just like today you would say, "I don't think I'm always treated fairly at work, and I'm not paid fairly," and you have all these things that are going on. What Paul is saying is, "Ultimately who you work for is your heavenly Master, and He has given you a reward that goes far beyond what you could ever earn or deserve." So, again, you go back through what we've studied in Colossians. All that we have in Christ, the riches that are in Christ, this amazing inheritance we have that we haven't earned or deserved, we receive on the basis of the grace and mercy of God. Ultimately that's the Master we serve, and He has rewarded us far beyond anything we could earn or deserve. So before you start grumbling too much about what's unfair, let's remember, it's really unfair that He has given you all that. You didn't earn it or deserve it. It's all on the basis of His grace and mercy. Ultimately then, you serve Him, and you serve Him well.

Verse 25 is like the transition into **masters**. It's kind of a hinge here:

> **For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.** (Vs. 25-4:1)

So the basic idea is, at the end of the day, God holds people accountable. What was radical in this was what they were being told is not only would the slaves be held responsible for whether they do right or wrong, but **without partiality** means *so will the masters*. In the Roman culture, masters had no accountability. They could do whatever they want. Slaves were considered their property. But now in this new life in Christ, they are equal in every way. Again, you've got the same dynamic that was in this congregation. You have husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves, and masters—all gathered in this amazing melting pot that was unheard of in a Roman culture, called the church. As a part of that, there was an understanding you are all equal in every way before God. Even though it doesn't play out that way on earth, ultimately God is the Master, and that is how God sees it. So, the reminder is: *there will be accountability for right and wrong, whether you're a slave or a master.* The **masters,** then, **are to grant their slaves justice and fairness**. Again, the reminder: **knowing you too have a Master in heaven.** The earthly master was to rightly represent the heavenly Master. Treat your slaves the way you want to be treated by the heavenly Master. It would have been, again, just radical to tell a master you need to treat these slaves with justice and fairness. That just wasn't done.

Charity is a beautiful thing. We involve ourselves in a lot of ways to try to help those in need. But the reality is, if there was more fairness and justice, there would be less need for so much charity. That's just part of life in a broken world. So Paul is calling masters and slaves—in our culture we would say employers and employees—to do your part to rightly represent Jesus in the workplace. Ultimately whom you serve is Jesus; whom you represent is Jesus, and it should look different than how it's done in the rest of the world. It's really hard to imagine anything more practical than the environments that define our lives every day.

What should this new life in Christ look like at home, between husbands and wives, between parents and children, at work between employers and employees? So, let's imagine this. Let's imagine we took all this seriously. Let's imagine we actually believe what Colossians says. We

believe this new life. We believe that we are filled with the fullness of Christ—all these things that we've learned—and we're determined to live that way in these environments. The community looks on and they start to think, "I don't know what the deal is with these Bereans. They seem kind of like weirdos to me, but they have the most amazing marriages. They have the most loving families. And I'll tell you one thing, they make the best employees. They make the best employers. They make the best business owners, and even though we don't really completely understand these people, we would have to say this community is better because they are here." That's what Paul is saying. We've been called to a new standard, to a new way of life, to rightly represent Jesus in the most practical arenas of our lives.

Whatever you do, in word, or deed, do all in the name of Jesus.

Our Father, we're thankful this morning for the new life we have in Christ, this new life that we will celebrate together in baptism this morning. Lord, may this new life rightly shine at home and out in the community as our witness to the life-changing power of Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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FALL 2022 // WEEK 9

Life Group Questions

Colossians – Rooted in Christ // Nov 5-6, 2022

In Christ at Home, Work and Beyond // Colossians 3:18-4:1

Introduction

The text this week presents Paul's instructions on how Christian households were to function due to their members being rooted in Jesus. Living out a life grounded in Jesus begins at home.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) We'd love for you to take about 5 minutes **during** your group meeting to tell us how participating in a Life Group has influenced your walk with Jesus. Here is a link to the survey: https://forms.office.com/r/D10pY0VeZ3 **Or use this QR Code:**

2) Once you are finished with the Survey, take a few minutes to share with your group about the following questions:
    a. **How has God used this group in your life?**
    b. **How have you seen God at work in the lives of others in this group?**
    c. **Is there anything you would like to change about this group?**

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) The temptation in listening to a sermon on a passage like this week's is to think how it applies to others ("My wife/husband/children/parents really needed to hear that.") rather than to oneself. In what specific way(s) did *Colossians* 3:18-4:1 convict you?

2) Paul didn't drop these household instructions out of the blue. He thought they were connected to what he previously said. How do you see Paul's instructions to spouses, parents and children, and masters and slaves to be related to the Christian's sufficiency in Jesus?

   Have you found the resources we have in our rootedness in Jesus to be helpful to you in your relationships at home and work? Explain.

3) In the 1st Century Roman world, various groups developed "household codes" which described their ideal for how families were to be ordered in that society. Paul is using this model but presenting a Christian version that reflects Jesus' teaching. What are the expectations our society has for how families are to be ordered and run? How are those expectations similar to or different from what *Colossians* 3:18-4:1 presents?

   Do you think the instructions Paul gives are relevant to Christian families in 2022? Can people thrive in our world today by adhering to his instructions? Why or why not?

4) Though slavery in Paul's day was not the same as the slavery we find in the history of our nation, it was still not what God wanted for human beings. Nonetheless, even in their position of enslavement, Christian slaves were to represent Jesus well in their role and tasks. And Christian masters were called to treat their slaves fairly and justly. **If God desired that Christians involved in such an undesirable institution like slavery live consistently with their commitment to Jesus, what should that tell us about the employer/employee relationships Christians have today?**

What would it look like for you to be the ideal employee? Employer? Give specific details.

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Reflection: Take time this week to give yourself a "job review." In the areas that are relevant to you, write out an assessment of how you are doing as a husband/wife, parent/child, employer/employee. For each relevant area, list three things you are doing well and three areas which need improvement. What overall grade would you give yourself? What overall grade would your spouse, parents/children, employer/employee give you?

Prayer: Spend time every day this week praying for a family member or a person at work you have a conflict with. Do *not* ask God to change him or her. Rather ask God to bless that person. Ask God to reveal areas in your life which might be the source of the conflict. Ask God for wisdom in how to make whatever corrections are needed in your life.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?