

“The Home Where Christ Reigns Supreme”

Colossians 3:18—4:1

June 19, 2022

Happy Father’s Day to all our dads! I am most certainly thankful for my father who just turned 89 years old last Sunday and who continues to pray for me, encourage me, and lead me with the example of his love.

In a culture that is bent on destroying God’s distinctive design for men and women, we unashamedly honor godly manhood and fatherhood just as we honor godly womanhood and motherhood. And BTW, the best way thing we can do to honor women is not to destroy the distinctiveness between men and women, but to preserve such distinctions according to God’s design and calling.

We are often told today that the traditional views of men, women, and marriage are antiquated at best or even destructive. Yet what has been destructive is not God’s design, but those who abuse and reject God’s design.

The story has been told of a man who sat frustrated along the side of the road because his model T has broken down. After a while, an old man came along and offered to take a look at his car. The frustrated young man rudely shrugged him off. What could an old man know about the modern technology of cars? But what the young man didn’t know is that he had refused the help of Henry T. Ford. Well, in a similar way, if we want life to flourish as men and women, we would be wise to listen to our Creator who designed us and gave us our purpose as men and women. The God who designed family.

As we come to the end of Colossians 3, Paul is turning his attention from how we should relate to each other in the body of Christ because of our oneness with Jesus to who we should relate to each other in family because Christ is Lord. Let me suggest to you that the best way for us to have genuine gospel community in the church is to live under the reign of Christ in our families. Here’s why: the quality of our relationships is determined by the quality of our character, and our character is forged in our closest

relationships where our guard comes down and we display our true selves. In other words, it’s easy to put on an air of godliness, humility, patience, gentleness, in the church, but who we truly are emerges in our homes and when godly character becomes the norm in our closest and most vulnerable relationships at home, it will carry over into our relationships with each other in the body of Christ. What Paul is going to teach us today is that ***for Christ to be the supreme Lord of our lives in a way that leads to true gospel community, He must reign supremely over our household relationships.***

Today we are going to look at *3 spheres of relationships that must be transformed as Christ reigns supremely in our lives.* He must reign supremely in our marriage relationships, our parent-child relationships, and our vocational relationships.

Before we dive into these 3 sphere’s of relationships, let me mention a couple things by way of background. First, in the first century Greco-Roman world, a household was made up of not only a married couple and their children, but also their servants. And while servants or slaves had a lower status, they are included in this portion of Colossians as a part of one’s household. And all of these household relationships will undergo transformation at a heart level when Christ reigns supremely over them. Remember last week, we were called to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, the word of Christ dwell richly among us, and the name of the Lord Jesus govern all we say and do. That is, when our hearts are ruled by the peace God the very principles of the gospel and the character of Christ by which we were reconciled to God, it will transform the way we speak and act toward one another. And the most critical relationships for us to apply this gospel thinking and living to in the spirit of Christ, is in our own households.

The second thing I need to mention by way of background is that while Paul is addressing all of the household relationships, he is particularly focused on the man of the house who occupied 3 of the 6 roles mentioned here: husband, father, master. In the first century world, the man of the household assumed absolute authority. But O the transformation that will take place when Christ becomes the Lord of every person in the household and the man sees himself first as a servant of Christ and understands that

the ultimate authority that every member of the household must honor is Christ above himself. This may be why Paul curiously address wives before husbands, children before fathers, and slaves before masters. A man's authority is brought into check by recognizing that those he leads ultimately serve a higher Master.

With that, let's take a close look at these three spheres of relationships that must be transformed as Christ reigns supremely in our lives:

1. **Christ must reign supremely in our marriage relationships** (3:18-19).

[vs. 18-19] Paul begins by addressing wives in vs. 18: "*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*" Vs. 18 is specifically addressing only wives. God never commands husbands to make sure that their wives submit to them. It is a wife's responsibility before the Lord to voluntarily come under the leadership, safety, and blessing of her husband's growing godly character.

I realize how very repulsive the idea of submission is in our general culture, and most certainly it has been abused. So let me clarify what Paul is not calling wives to here.

- **Submission is not inequality.** We know from Gen 1 that God created both men and women in His image and Gal 3:28 clarifies that men and women have equal standing in Christ: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

God has made husbands and wives equal in personhood, value, and significance, and yet He has given them distinct roles in family life. It's important for us to not confuse equality with role distinction. Just as parents and children are equal in personhood but have very distinct roles; just as governing authorities and citizens have equal personhood yet distinct roles; so husbands and wives have equality in personhood with distinct God-given roles—one is called to lead the other. *This is a reflection of God Himself in which each member of the Trinity has equality of personhood yet functions in unique roles.*

- **Submission is not servitude or suppression.** It is not a license for husbands to be domineering, controlling, or abusive—nothing could be further from the truth. A wife's submission to her husband does not give him the right to order her to serve his selfish desires. The Spirit of Christ never takes advantage of others.

Submission is the honorable, Christlike willingness of a wife to come under the loving authority of her husband in so much as his leadership does not cause her to sin against God. Vs. 18 says that for a wife to subject herself to her husband's leadership is "*fitting in the Lord*"—fitting for one who is in Christ. Why? Because Christ Himself lived in submission to the authority of His Father. It is the way a wife expresses the honorable, selfless, Christ-like character of Jesus as displayed through the gospel (Gethsemane). Through Christ-like submission, a wife not only does God's will but also reflect the character of Jesus to her husband.

If you have any remaining concerns about the Bible's concept of submission in marriage, consider how God commands husbands to relate to their wives. In vs. 19 Paul says, "husbands *love your wives* and do not be embittered against them." Paul gives further clarification in Eph 5 when he commands husbands "*to love their wives as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*" It should not be a risk for our wives to submit to us, husbands, when we are dying to our selfish interests and loving them with a sacrificial, servant-hearted love that puts their needs and interests ahead of our own.

Husbands, loving your wife begins with vs. 12-13, putting on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness toward our wives.

Submission is a challenging call for wives, yet true Christ-like love is not a less demanding call for husbands. Both submission and loving leadership require dying to one's selfish interests to honor Christ and serve their spouse.

For the record, it's true that these biblical roles have often been abused when they are not lived out in the spirit of Christ. Yet, male dominance is not overcome by erasing the God-given role distinctions between husbands and wives, but by instructing men to lead with the love and character of Christ.

Women are not delivered from suppression by erasing the biblical role distinctions between husbands and wives, but by empowering them to live under the higher authority of Christ and to fulfill their role by imitating His honorable character.

Vs. 19 not only commands husbands to love their wives, but also warns them to guard their hearts against bitterness toward their wives. It's easy to become embittered. All you have to do is give little or no attention to your own sanctification in the midst of conflict and you are sure to grow bitter toward your spouse. Just focus on her faults, weaknesses, and sins instead of God's grace and you will nurture bitterness. The worst possible place for a wife to live is under a bitter, angry, selfish husband.

Bitterness is the prolonged punishment we heap on someone for not meeting our expectations. It comes from the heart of an enthroned self that proudly believes that the other should serve him. That bitter self is only dethroned by the gospel which puts Christ, the ultimate Servant, on the throne of our lives to rebuild our hearts with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. These qualities are grace and love in action.

So how do you combat bitterness in your marriage? First, you have to go after the sins of pride in your own heart with the same tenacity of uprooting weeds from your garden. Then you fertilize the good produce of Christ-like character in your heart by abiding in Jesus to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. When these Christ-like qualities of vs. 12-14 are missing, bitterness has room to grow. But where these qualities are put into practice and nurtured, the weeds of bitterness are choked out.

2. Christ must reign supremely in parent-child relationships (3:20-21).

[vss. 20-21] While verse 20 is addressed to children, we know from the wider context of Scripture that it is not just for children, but also for parents, because parents are instructed to discipline their children so that they will fear the Lord and walk in proper obedience. Children will not obey their

parents in all things and consequently be pleasing to the Lord if parents do not disciple and discipline their children.

There is a child-centered culture that is permeating many of our homes and schools to the detriment of our children. We have become too focused on our children's self-esteem rather than building godly character. We find ourselves tempted to redirect our children rather than correct our children. And now our culture is telling us to not even direct our children in matters as essential as their gender identity rather than teaching biological boys how to be men and biological girls how to be women. Our children are growing up in a cultural mine field. And in this culture, our children need parents who disciple them in the truth and discipline them for godly living.

By the way, if you have a child who is unduly discouraged with himself, the answer is not to merely prop up his self-esteem by making his emotions central, but rather teaching him that his identity and confidence is in Christ through the gospel so that God will be central in His life.

If we swerve away from the ditch of child-centered parenting, we may swing too hard toward the other ditch of parent-centering parenting. What our children need is God-centered parenting. Let me give you a caricature of each approach:

- Child-centered parenting serves the child's agenda, often with mild consequence or empty warnings for disobedience. This form of parenting tends to be soft and the home is centered around the child's desires or schedule.
- Parent-centered parenting serves the parent's agenda—do what I say, because I said so—period! His form of parenting can easily become harsh and center around the home centers around the parent's interests. But...
- God-centered parenting says, "God has given me the responsibility to raise you in the ways of the Lord, therefore I must discipline you so that you will learn to honor God and experience His blessing. The good news is that Jesus went to the cross to pay for the very sin you are being disciplined for, so you can be forgiven."¹ In God-centered parenting, the parent sees himself as a servant of God to lead the

¹ For more information on child-centered, parent-centered, and God-centered parenting, see "The Heart of Anger" by Lou Priolo (TEFC library).

child to follow after God's interests. This kind of parenting requires prayer, discernment, self-control, courage, biblical wisdom, and constant submission to Christ on the road of sanctification. God-centered parenting requires the wisdom apply both grace and truth while leaning on the leading and power of the Holy Spirit.

So parents, we must help our children obey vs. 20 through loving discipline and daily discipleship that keeps God central, builds their character, and opens the door for the gospel to engage their hearts. This discipline must be consistent, so that they will learn to obey us "in all things" and consequently learn to obey God in all things.

Don't miss the last phrase: "this is well-pleasing to the Lord."

- The goal is not for the child to please self.
- The goal is not for the child to merely please their parents.
- The goal is for the child to please the Lord and experience His favor and blessing through an obedient and honorable life that is centered on God and grounded in the hope of the gospel.

And therefore, the goal of the child's life must also be the goal of our parenting, to lead our child into a God-pleasing life. This is why vs. 21 proceeds to instruct fathers to "*not exasperate your children so that they will not lose heart.*" In other words, don't provoke your child to discouragement. There are perhaps a thousand ways we could provoke our children. But let me just suggest a few:

- *Failing to have our own hope rooted in God.* If the goal is for children to have hope-filled lives, then we need to model hope-filled lives that are confidently trusting in the Lord as the source of our joy.
- *Failure to discipline our children.* Children who lack discipline will not learn to walk in the ways of righteousness and will grow discouraged and walk outside of God's blessing.

Prov 13:24—"He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently."

Prov 19:18—"Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death."

- *Disciplining our children in an overly harsh, impulsive, erratic, or inconsistent way.* "Unpredictable, impulsive, hostile discipline makes children fearful, bitter, deceitful, and discouraged. On the other hand, when discipline is controlled, and appropriate, and consistent and based on clear rules and principles of justice in the home, an atmosphere is created where children flourish in freedom."²

The goal is discipline that is motivated by love, builds godly character, and grounds our child's hope in the gospel by leading them out of sin to be reconciled with God. This kind of discipline comes from a parent that is growing in their walk with Christ, modeling a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love along with self-discipline.

Next week we will address the third sphere of relationships that must be transformed as Christ reigns supremely in our lives as we address Paul's instructions to slaves and masters and seek to apply those principles to our own vocational relationships.

3. Christ must reign supremely in our vocational relationships (3:22-4:1).

As we conclude today's study, let's step back and see the big picture. Christ is the only Lord who is worthy of reigning supremely in our homes. Under the supremacy of Jesus, a man's authority in his home is tempered by his submission to Christ. Husband's and fathers, we are called to imitate the servant leadership of Jesus in our homes by loving our wives with Christ-like love. We are called to lead our children with Christ-like character that disciplines and disciplines them with grace and truth so that they will be equipped to live courageous, hope-filled lives set on pleasing the Lord.

Wives, under the loving reign of Christ, your motivation to honor your husband's leadership is transformed by a desire to honor Christ and display His humble, serving, and submissive character to your husband.

² John Piper, "Fathers who Give Hope." Sermon on Colossians 3:21 from June 15, 1986.

Children, your motivation and desire to obey your parents will be transformed when you understand that to disobey your parents is to also disobey God.

Let's pray that our homes will indeed be a place where Christ reigns supremely!

- Husbands/Fathers
- Wives
- Children