

## **Colossians: The Incomparable Christ – Exposition of Colossians XIV**

**Colossians 3:18-21**

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Please turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter three. We have said throughout our study of His book, that God reveals in His word, through His book, that believers are complete in Christ. In chapter one, the apostle focuses on the person and the work of Christ, and says that if we will remember who He is and what He has done, much of the Christian life will fall into place. In chapter two, he issues warnings against misunderstandings about Christ and how we find fullness in Him, which actually detract from our completeness in Christ, and can lead us astray. In chapter three, we said that Paul begins to make practical application of the principle of the supremacy of Christ, the incomprableness of Christ, the rule of Christ in our lives. We saw, in verses one through eight, the apostle apply the principle of Christ's supremacy to our daily lives. In verses nine through seventeen last week, we saw the apostle apply the principle of the supremacy of Christ, the rule of Christ, to our life within the congregation of the local church. And this week we will see the apostle apply the principle of the rule of Christ to the family life, to the home. Let's listen to the Word of the living God. Hear God's inspired and inerrant word:

### **Colossians 3:18-21**

Our heavenly Father, these words are simple but hard. Easy to understand, perhaps, hard to accept for many, and certainly, difficult to obey. We need the grace of the Spirit, not merely to grasp and embrace these principles, but to live them. And so we ask that by the Spirit this day, You would make us hearers and doers of the word, all for Christ's sake, Amen.

We hear much today about a crisis in family values. Here, the apostle gives his own domestic directives on how family life ought to be lived by Christians. I must point out, however, that his directions are less than politically correct. I can imagine in some environments, where a mere reading of these passages would cause audible gasps to be heard in the audience. But these are Paul's words. Paul, through his passage, reminds us that the rule of Christ begins at home. Godliness is best reflected in family life. His was a Puritan principle, not because they thought it up, but because they saw this teaching in Paul's teaching.

Holiness is not to be found by withdrawing from our daily responsibilities; holiness is rather found in our daily responsibilities, in our daily duties, in our family life, doing these duties and responsibilities as unto the Lord, so that even our domestic responsibilities become sanctified and used as an instrument in the hands of the Spirit for our further sanctification. Paul, throughout his passage, wants us to recognize that the supremacy of Christ is worked out practically in the lives of Christians at home. And so, he gives four concise directives for the Christian family life.

## **I. Wives be submissive to your husbands**

And he begins with this one in verse 18: "Wives, be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord." Wives, he says, be submissive to your husbands. Now, this, of course, in our own day and age is a controversial command. There are many people there, today, who would like to get rid of this word. But, let me say that Paul's word is based on broad-based biblical teaching. Paul roots his teaching in creation, in the fall (but a direct biblical command) and, also, in the very nature of things. In 1st Timothy 2:13-14, he says that the order of creation, the headship of husbands in the home, is based on the way God created and on the results of the fall. Here, and also in Ephesians chapter 5:23, he gives a direct biblical mandate that wives are to be submissive to their husbands, and that husbands are to be the head of their homes. And in 1 Corinthians 11:14, he says that nature itself teaches that men are to have headship in the home.

That is controversial. It wasn't long ago, when a very prominent national women's organization attacked the Promise Keepers movement because it was fostering the idea of male headship, an idea whose time had gone in the view of this particular women's organization. Paul would not fare much better. But let me say, that Paul's call to submission is not a call to servile or childish submission. In fact, Paul's call to submission entails at least these three things: First of all, Paul calls wives to a practical recognition of the divinely given order of the household. Paul wants wives to know that that is not only how God has made things to be, but He has made things to be that way for their good. His is the divinely given order of the household, and when His order is reversed, when these roles are reversed, just like with Adam and Eve in the fall, it always results not only in the destruction of the man, but in the self-destruction of the wife. And so he calls for a recognition of the divinely given order of the household.

Secondly, in his call for submission, he is asking for practical recognition of the husband's authority under God; A recognition that the man bears certain responsibilities before the living God, for which one day he will give an accounting at the throne of God, and which, if ignored, Peter says, can hinder the man's prayers from being heard. It is an awesome thing to be appointed the head of the household. One's dereliction of duty results, Peter says, in the Lord

refusing to hear one's prayers. The wife is to recognize that awesome weight of responsibility that the husband has, and support him in it.

And finally, Paul's call for submission entails the wife's sacrificial self-giving loyalty to her husband. He calls upon her to show that type of sacrificial loyalty which Christ himself shows to His people. This is what is involved in the submission that Paul calls for on the part of wives. Why in the world, if husbands are the head of the house, does Paul begin by speaking to wives first? Well, there may be many reasons for that. Let me suggest just two: First of all, Paul's word to the wife first is designed to protect the order and structure of the home. Even in his society there were waves crashing against the family, and, Paul wants to protect that order in the home. And he begins by speaking to the place where, perhaps, the first reversal may occur. Secondly, Paul mentions this directive to the wife, first, because one might be tempted to draw this conclusion from biblical logic: We are free in Christ, there is neither male nor female in Christ, therefore, as a wife, I no longer have the responsibilities for submission to the head of the household because I am free and equal in Christ. The Apostle Paul does not want our logic to go that way. He wants us to draw this conclusion: Because I have freedom in Christ, I am now free--with the right motives--to follow the biblical principles which have ever stood in this world, divinely given by God for the life of the family. And that includes recognizing the headship of the husband in the home. Paul gives this command to wives in a specific context, he says: "Wives, be submissive as is fitting in the Lord." What Paul says is this: This is what it means for a married woman to express her belief that Christ is Lord. What does it mean for a married woman to live as if Christ is Lord? One thing, Paul is saying, is that that woman is showing a proper relation, a proper submission to her husband. Dick Lucas, the director of St. Helen's, Bishopgate, puts it this way: "According to Paul, there is no possibility of a married woman's surrender to a heavenly Christ which is not made visible and actual by some submission to an earthly husband." His directive is not mine, not the Puritan's, it not even ultimately Paul's. And when it is ignored, it does not make life better for women, it actually makes life worse. And I would argue that many of the stresses and strains on family life today are precisely due to disagreeing or ignoring His particular biblical directive.

## **II. Husbands love your wives**

But Paul gives this directive in the context of verse 19, and that is the second word that he has for us. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Here, Paul gives a command to Christian husbands to love. Isn't it interesting that the New Testament commands love. We don't think today very often about commanding love. You can't command someone to love, but no one has told the apostle Paul. He turns to husbands and says, 'Love your wives. Do it. You must love your wives. It's not an option. It's not something peripheral to your

obligations. It is your job. You must love you wives.' He is not hesitant to command husbands to do this.

Notice that the wife's submission and the husband's love form reciprocal duties within the marital relationship. There are mutual obligations and responsibilities beautifully meeting, and interestingly going against our natural tendencies. What may be the natural tendency of a man: to neglect his duty of love. What may the natural tendency of the woman: To be disloyal to her husband, or to undercut his authority. And yet, Paul calls on the two of them, in their mutual relationships to fulfill these reciprocal responsibilities: 'Wives, be loyal,' 'Husbands, love.' Notice again that the apostle calls on men to show not just a romantic love, and not just a familial love to his wife, but to show that agape love, that self-giving love which Christ has shown to the church, that love which looks out for the other's best interest, that love which puts one's own position and one's own resources and one's own privileges at the disposal of the one that you service. That sort of love that desires to up build the person who is being loved. This is the type of love Paul calls on husbands to show their wives. Martin Luther once said, "The Christian is supposed to love his neighbor, and since his wife is his nearest neighbor, she should be his deepest love." This is not something that Paul leaves up in the air, Paul commands this type of love from husbands to wives. How easy it is to follow these directions, relatively, when both partners are expressing and obeying these commands. How easy it is for a loving husband to be given deference by his wife. How easy it is for a woman who knows that a husband loves her, to submit to him, knowing that all his actions are directed for her best interests. How easy it is for a man to love a woman that he knows is loyal to him, who gives deference to him, who submits to him in appropriate circumstances, how easy that is. But how hard these things are when these things are both not true within a relationship ship. And yet the apostle Paul does not give a qualification to these commands. He does not say, 'Wives be loyal if he loves you,' and he doesn't say , 'Husbands, love her if she is loyal.' He simply says, 'Wives be loyal, husbands love.' And that's the real challenge, isn't it?

It's difficult sometimes, in the context of a broken relationship to keep from expressing bitterness, and yet Paul is waiting, waiting for that husband who says, 'But you don't know how unsupportive my wife is.' He is waiting for him at the end of verse 19, when he says, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Paul has added a practical test of love. Do you want to see if you are truly loving your wife? Are you embittered to her in your heart.

Does your bitterness flow into your language. Paul is saying, 'Husbands, love your wife in this way, do not be harsh. Love her with your lips and your heart, even if she has broken your heart.' Bitterness easily creeps into human relationships, and then it justifies itself and so it becomes more deeply entrenched. A wife can disappoint a man's hopes and ambitions.

And such feelings of disappointment can quickly find expression in harshness, in bitterness, in hard words. And the apostle Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." "The woman takes her being from man," Thomas Adams said, "but man takes his well being from woman." Paul knew that man's love for his own wife was not only a blessing for her, it was a blessing for him. "For he who lives his wife," Paul says, "loves himself." We put it this way: 'A happy wife is a happy life.' And it's true. Paul knows that the happiness of one's spouse directly impacts on one's own happiness, and he calls husbands to love their wives.

### **III. Children obey your parents**

The next command we see in this passage is for children: "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord." Notice Paul's command there, "obey." Children are to obey. Paul, again, is saying 'This is how a Christian child expresses his or her desire to serve the Lord. This is how a Christian child manifests the rule of Christ in his or her life. The child obeys his or her parents.' That's how you see the rule of Christ in someone's life, when a husband loves, when a wife is loyal, and when a child obeys. Children, don't underestimate the importance of this.

Obedience is very important to the Lord. Isn't it interesting, in Romans chapter one, in the midst of all of those horrible sins listed in that degenerate society, right in the middle of it, is disobedience to parents. Turn with me there in Romans chapter one, and we read this beginning with verse 28: "God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but give hearty approval to those who practice them." God takes obedience to parents very, very seriously. It is a manifestation of the rule of Christ in our lives. We cannot say Christ is Lord, and live lives of perverse and continual disobedience to our parents. It is part of our Christian life to live in obedience to our parents.

And let me say, in passing, that obedience is absolutely necessary for education itself. Have you ever thought about that? The only way we can ever learn, is to defer to authority. Harry Balymiers, the author of *The Christian Mind*, says this: "There is a stage of educational development at which perhaps Ian Flemming seems more entertaining than Shakespeare, and Gilbert and Sullivan more tuneful and attractive than Bach. The young pupil grows to maturity of taste insofar as he distrusts his own firsthand judgments in these matters, which would prefer Ian Flemming to Shakespeare and Gilbert and Sullivan to Bach, and gives the benefit of the doubt to traditional literary and musical orthodoxy, patiently,

perhaps, in some respects, arduously, training his understanding to the point at which he, too, not only accepts on authority that Shakespeare and Bach are worthy of maximum attention and veneration, but can also personally testify to the validity of the orthodox evaluation.” Education is rooted in deference to authority. If we not defer to authority, specifically, the authority of our parents in the home, and the authority to those other people in the world that God has put over us, we ultimately rob ourselves of the ability to grow, because God has made the world in such a way that the only way we grow is improper deference to authority.

The Lord takes these matters seriously. Notice the comprehensiveness of the command in verse 20: “Obey your parents in all things.” His is not a blanket command, given so that children will even do things positively against the word of God that their parents tell them to do. His is a blanket command to remind children that God has placed their parents in a unique position of authority. There will be many things in life for which there is no ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ where there is no explicit biblical word. Your parents will have to make judgment calls in those circumstances, and God is saying to you to defer to their authority in that, follow them, be obedient to them in all things.

Notice, again, the context of his command to children. “Obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.” What’s the motivation for obedience to parents? In this passage, Paul says, because “It is pleasing to the Lord.” The context of disobedience is the pleasure of the Lord. Have you ever thought about it? The young people in this room, have you ever thought about it? That obeying your parents brings the Lord pleasure, that in heaven the heavenly Father is taking pleasure in the fact that you obey your parents. He derives joy from it. He takes pleasure in it. Many of you saw the movie Chariots of Fire, where Eric Liddel explained to his sister that he ran because God made him to run, and he went on to say that, when he ran he felt God’s pleasure, because God had made him to run. He took pleasure and he felt the pleasure of God in doing what God had made him to do. God takes pleasure when you obey your parents, Paul says.

#### **IV. Fathers do not provoke your children**

Finally, in verse 21, Paul says, Fathers, do not provoke your children: “Do not exasperate your children that they will not lose heart.” Paul’s command here for fathers, is specifically that they would not dishearten and discourage their children in the context of discipline. We may ask, ‘Why not mothers here?’ And perhaps the answer is apparent. Perhaps it is that fathers have more of a tendency to be heavy handed in the criticism and discipline than do the mothers. His is a warning against destructive and continual criticism, a warning against over severe punishment that would break the spirit of a child. And Paul is saying, ‘Be careful fathers, as you discipline, as you rear your child in the correction of

the Lord, do not be destructive and continual in your criticism of them so that they lose heart.'

He gives that rationale: "so that they will not lose heart." In other words, punishment and correction, though it must be done, must be done and balanced with the positive discipline of the Lord, time spent with children in teaching them and encouraging them and instructing them both verbally and by example in the way of the Lord, pointing them positively to Christ, telling them that they have done well, and not only telling them when they have not done well, telling them that they have pleased you and pleased the Lord, and not only when they have displeased the Lord. Paul is calling fathers to rear their children in such a way that they will not feel only the rebuke of God, but they will also feel His approval.

I remember when Gordon Reed's son went before the presbytery for his examination, and he was asked to give his testimony, his Christian experience, and he began by saying "I was raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but mostly the admonition." Many of us feel the same way sometimes. I myself was a poster child for spanking. Spanking worked on me. I understood spanking. I obviously did not understand it that well, because they had to do it a lot, but I did understand what it was designed to evoke. But my younger brother, spanking didn't phase. Children are different. Paul know that. Parents need to be careful. My younger brother, didn't respond at all, and my youngest brother didn't need it at all. He was perfect from the time he was born, which is a pretty discouraging thing for a first-born son, I might add. Paul is saying, 'Don't provoke your children. Be attentive to them instruct them, nurture them and balance your admonition with that Christian nurture.' Oh, what a glorious life Christian life in the home ought to be. But it's not that way all the time is it friends? Paul wouldn't be saying His if everything were always rosy in the Christian home.

There will be many here this morning who are discouraged about their home life, and I trust that God's word for you will spur you on in a desire to emulate Godly home life. J. I Packer tells us about Puritan home life, I share it with you briefly: "The Puritans crusaded for a high view of the family, proclaiming it both as the basic unit of society, and a little church in itself, with the husband as its pastor and the wife as his assistant, subordinate, indeed, in the chain of command, but a key figure in the ongoing pastoral process, nonetheless. As head of the family, the husband must be treated with respect. It was the husband's responsibility to channel the family into religion, to take them to church on the Lord's day, to oversee the sanctifying of that entire day in the home, to catechize the children, to teach them in the faith, to examine the whole family after the sermon, to see how much had been retained and understood, to fill in any gaps in understanding that might remain, to lead the family in worship daily, ideally, twice a day, and to set an example of sober godliness at all times and in all matters. The Puritans accounted religion as an engagement to duty, and that the best Christians should be the best husbands, the best wives, the best children, the best masters, the best servants, the best magistrates, the best subjects, that the doctrine of God

might be adorned and not blasphemed by the way we live. And so Puritan teachers thought humane family life in which Christian love and joy would find full and free expression could not be achieved until this ordered pattern of Paul's regular authority, structure and daily routine had been firmly established."Do you desire after a Godly family life? I pray so, for homes are nurseries of religion, and if the true faith is not implanted in the home, it will not be implanted anywhere.

Notice, also, the necessity of grace as we seek to be Christians in the home. We could not do these things were it not for grace. Husbands and wives are sinners. Parents and children are sinners. We need the grace of God to establish this type of a life. This is not something for a human being to attempt on their own. Only the grace of God can help us here. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, we are shown the depth of our sin. And though that's a discouraging thing, it's the first step towards encouragement, because when we realize that we can't do it on our own we are precisely at the point where God wants us. We can reach out to him and ask him to help us to live the lives He has called us to live in the home.

Perhaps you are an unbeliever today. What does His word have for you? A word solely about instruction for Christian living in the home. Surely there is no word here for you. Ah, but there is. God has a family, and His family is the best taken care of family in the world. And He sent His Son to die that all those who call on His name might no longer be His enemies, but His sons and His daughters. Come to God's family today. You will find him waiting With arms to embrace you. Let's look to Him in prayer:

Our Lord and our God, we bless Your holy name, we acknowledge that these words are easy but hard, easy to understand but hard to embrace and obey. Help us to obey them by the Spirit and for Your glory. And we will give You all the praise for we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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