

SERVANTS AND MASTERS

Colossians 3:22-4:1

Intro: I hope that all of us are believers in the orderliness of Scripture.

By that I mean, among other things, that the Apostle Paul who, in this case wrote the epistle to the Colossians, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, in an orderly fashion. He laid a foundation of doctrine in the first two chapters. Then seventeen verses of chapter 3 he applied the doctrine to their daily life. And in verse 18 of chapter 3, and going on through the first verse of chapter 4, Paul zeroed in, so to speak, on the Christian home. Then a few more exhortation in chapter 4, verses 2 through 6, he drew his letter to a close.

We learn to know the Lord and his Word, and to live in obedience to His will as individuals. But then we learn to continue to walk with the Lord as members of Christian families. Wives and husbands come first. Children and parents follow, and then, as we see in the verses I hope to cover this morning, Paul went on to speak of servants and masters.

Now what he said in these verses (vv. 3:18 through 4:1) are God's plan for all families. But let me add that Paul did not expect that you would find this divine plan worked out with any degree of success except in families where they all know the Lord. None of us is perfect, and so we don't have perfect families. But that is our goal. Let me illustrate what I mean. I want to give you an illustration from the life of Dr. Chafer which he passed on to us in one of the several classes I had with him at Dallas Seminary.

In the early days of the twentieth century plane travel was available, but it was not very common. People did most of their traveling from city to city, or from one side of our country to the other side, by train. And every train traveling any distance at all would have a diner. Dr. Chafer was out traveling either to or from some meetings that he had, and he was having breakfast in the diner on this particular morning. The diner was filling up, and so the man in charge might ask you if you were already seated, if another person, or persons, could sit at your table. This happened to Dr. Chafer. He agreed for this person sit at his table, and it turned out to be a young married woman. They engaged in conversation as they got acquainted, exchanging names, where are you going, etc. When this young woman learned that Dr. Chafer was a minister, she asked him if she could discuss a personal problem with him. Of course, he agreed, and

she poured out her heart to him about her marriage. She and her husband had gotten married with high hopes that they had found true happiness, but then everything had fallen apart, and they were seriously considering a divorce, but she really did not want a divorce. So she asked Dr. Chafer if he could help her. He said that he hoped he could, but that he would have to ask her a question first. And depending on the answer she gave to his question, he would know what direction to take in helping her. So she agreed to answer his question.

He obviously surprised her when he asked her if she knew Jesus Christ as her Savior. She really didn't know what he was talking about. And so he began to explain the Gospel to her. He explained to her that we all were born in sin, and how that had affected everyone born into the world. He talked to her about Christ and His death on the Cross, and showed her that in salvation the Lord gives us new life and makes us new in our hearts. After a lengthy discussion when she had a lot of questions to ask him, he asked her if she would like to receive Christ as her Savior, and she said that she would. Now he said after praying for her, I want you to go home and tell you husband what we have been talking about this morning. She said that she would, and she was profoundly grateful for all that he had told her. He gave her his address at the Seminary, and told her to keep in touch with him.

Several weeks later, as I remember the story, he got a letter from this same young lady, and she told him that she had told her husband what Dr. Chafer had told her, and the result was that, after a period of time (and I don't remember how long it was), her husband had been saved, and all talk about a divorce was history. He encouraged her to get into a church where they could learn about the Bible, and the last that Dr. Chafer knew they were growing the Lord and happily married.

Now Dr. Chafer explained to us that he could have talked to her about submission to her husband, and that her husband was to love her. But Dr. Chafer was wise in his understanding of human nature, and of the Bible. He knew that that young, unhappy married lady needed Christ, and so he talked her about the Gospel. That was her basic need. And once she knew the Lord, everything else fell into place.

Now I am not saying that she didn't need verses like we have been studying in Colossians. She did need them. But she needed Christ first, and then she was ready for God's Word concerning what it means to have

a Christian home. A lot of people try to obey the Word without knowing the Lord. But the Gospel has to come first. Christians do have marital problems. And sometimes Christians get divorced. But the answer is in Scripture. God wants us to be happy. If you don't believe that, start counting the number of times the word "blessed" appears in the Bible. We as Christians need to preach the Gospel to ourselves every day. It is through the Gospel that we have been saved, but it is humbling to be reminded by the Gospel how hopeless we are without Christ, but how the prospect of blessing from the Lord is always there if we know Him, and are living to please Him.

Before we talk about servants and masters, let me pass on to you one thing that is true of what the Apostle Paul told wives to do, husbands to do, children to do, parents to do, and servants to do, and masters to do. This is what I want all of us to remember. *In each of these six instances the Apostle Paul was not speaking to them about their rights; he was talking to them about their responsibilities.* Do we know the difference between rights and responsibilities? In rights we are thinking about what others are obligated to give us; in responsibilities we are thinking about what we are to give others. In our day of widespread ungodliness we are obsessed with claiming our rights. This is basic selfishness. If we would concentrate on our responsibilities, there would be a lot more happy people, and a lot more happy homes.

The Lord did not tell wives to submit to their husbands IF their husbands always show love to them. The same is true of husbands. Paul did not say they were to love their wives IF their wives were submissive to them. And so on down the line. The Lord wants us to focus upon our responsibilities, and leave our rights up to Him.

A good illustration of this is to be seen in the life of Abraham. When he and Lot came out of Egypt they were so wealthy, and they had so many sheep and cattle that there was no way that they could all be using the same pasture lands. And so what did Abraham do? Who had the right to make the first choice? Abraham did. God did not call Lot to go to the promised land; he called Abraham, and Lot went with him. So Abraham had the first rights. But what did Abraham do? He gave the first choice to Lot. Why? Because Abraham knew that they should not be having trouble because, as he said, "for we be brethren." The NT version of this is in Romans 12:18-21:

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all

men.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now let us look at servants and masters in Colossians 3:22-4:1. We note here the same order as in wife and husband, and children and fathers.

I. THE SERVANTS (Col. 3:22-25).

Paul was speaking here of bondservants. If any group in the Roman Empire could be said to have little or no right, it was the bondservants. But Paul was very conscious of them, and very concerned about them. It is very likely that the early churches were made up primarily of bondservants. Paul used the same verb depicting the servants responsibility toward their masters as he did in speaking of a wives responsibility to their husbands: submit, or obey. That was their responsibility to their masters. Some masters were kind; some were cruel. Some were believers; some were heathen. But the same word of responsibility was given to all bondservants regardless of the kind of a master they had. And this obedience was to be “in all things.” The bondservant had no right to pick and choose what orders of his master he would obey. And their obedience was not just when their master was watching them, but at all times and under all circumstances.

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he had this to say about servants and their masters:

1 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

2 And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort (1 Tim. 6:1-2).

To Titus Paul wrote in Titus 2:9-10:

9 Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again;

10 Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may

adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

It will be interesting to find out when we get to heaven how many masters were brought to faith in Christ because of the faithfulness of their obedient servants who loved the Lord and adorned the doctrine of God by their obedience to their masters. I would think that there may have been many.

Now Paul raised the level of bondservants in each of verses 22, 23, and 24.

In verse 22 the Christian bondservants were to serve their masters “in singleness of heart, *i.e.*, sincerely, “fearing God.” They were to serve their masters with the fear of God in their hearts. Just as a Christian obeys because he does not want to displease the Lord, this same motive must be true of the bondservant’s service. He was in fact serving his Lord by serving his master

In verse 23 the servant is instructed to serve his master “heartily.” It means diligently just like they were serving the Lord, and not just a human master. So Paul brings the Lord into the picture for the servants again.

And then in verse 24 Paul brought the Lord against into the bondservant’s work. He is actually serving the Lord by serving his master. Thus the servant is to take encouragement and strength from the truth of the sovereignty of God.

On the other hand, in verse 25, if the servant does wrong, serving his master in rebellion because he has to, there are eternal consequences of the wrong kind to be faced, and even temporal consequences.

Thus, Paul, in speaking to the servants, shows how their position, although the lowest, may be in the eyes of God the highest, when service to the master is done as unto the Lord.

We should realize that all service that we are involved with as the people of God, is accepted by the Lord as done to and for Himself.

Remember that the servant may be a husband, and he may be a father. So these instructions may overlap in many cases, touching many lives in different roles.

But now let us go on to:

II. THE MASTERS (Col. 4:1).

The chapter division here is very unfortunate, but perhaps it helps to tie verses 2 through 6 especially with the latter part of Colossians 3.

John Eadie in his commentary makes this important observation. Speaking to the masters he expands upon the meaning:

Let the great Master's treatment of us be the model of your treatment of them. If the masters realized this fact, that in this higher service their slaves, if Christians, and themselves were colleagues, ransomed by the same price, the same service appointed to them, and the same prospect set before them, a tribunal before which they should stand on the same level, and an inheritance in which they should equally share, irrespective of difference in social rank upon earth, then would they be kept from all temptations to harshness and injury toward the dependents (p. 270).

And then Eadie quoted that remarkable passage spoken by Job and recorded for us in Job 31:13-15:

13 If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me;

14 What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?

15 Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?

Concl: What an important passage this is! And it applies to us just as much today as it did more than 2,000 years ago. How different our homes would be if all of us as believers would act upon our God-given responsibilities instead of being so concerned about our rights. If we do what God wants us to do, and it can only be done by His grace, how precious our fellowship would be, and how great an impact the Church would make upon the God-less, self-centered world in which we live. Let's not allow our excuses for our disobedience be allowed to stand against the clearly revealed Word of God. What God commands, He will enable us to do.