

THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL AT HOME

Colossians 3:18-21

Intro: In our study of Paul's letter to the church at Colosse, we come today to a section which is different from that which we have just completed. The practical section of Colossians begins with chapter 3. In chapters 1 and 2 Paul did what he usually did in writing to the churches, he laid a foundation of doctrine. Then in chapter 3 he applied the doctrine to the daily lives of the people of God.

That which he wrote down through verse 17 of chapter 3 applied to all believers – men, women, young people, and even boys and girls who had trusted in Christ for their salvation.

But when we get to verse 18 of chapter 3 we see that he began to address members of families – first wives, then husbands, next children, and then fathers. And from there he went on to speak of servants, and finally, masters in the first verse of chapter 4. After that he made several concluding exhortations in chapter 4, verses 2 through 6, which applied again to all of the Lord's people in Colosse.

I am sure that most of you know that the epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Ephesians are very similar. Obviously they must have been written very nearly at the same time. Some scholars believe that Colossians was written first to deal with the false teaching that had invaded the church in Colosse, and that Paul wrote Ephesians, giving more detail about the same truths, but as a letter to be circulated among several churches for the purpose of warding off the trouble that had come to Colosse. But the instructions to wives, husbands, children, and fathers appears in the same order in Ephesians that they do in Colossians, and approximately in the same place. By that I mean in both epistles you have doctrine first, followed by practical instructions given to all of the Lord's people in a general way, and then Paul's special instructions to wives, husbands, children, fathers, followed by his orders to servants and masters.

Now an important question is, "Why did Paul wait until the third chapter in Colossians and the fifth chapter in Ephesians before he spoke in a particular way to wives, husbands, children, etc.?"

It is not unusual at all for a young couple getting ready to be married, or an older couple who are having trouble in their married, either with each

other, or with their children, to go immediately to chapter 3 in Colossians, or chapter 5 in Ephesians. Well, you might say, “What is wrong about that?” Let me explain the point that I am making.

Paul did not write either epistle, Colossians or Ephesians, as what we might call *a manual on marriage and family life, or on the workplace*, which is what he was dealing with when he wrote about servants and masters. He did not intend that we were to consider Col. 3:18 to 4:1 independently of the rest of the epistle. In fact, in the first part of both epistles Paul was laying the foundation for a happy home, and for a godly relationship between servants and masters.

Now you don't need me to tell you that we are living in a day when most people don't want anything to do with the Bible. And organizations like the so-called American Civil Liberties Union are intent not only on getting rid of the Bible, but getting rid of God! Unfortunately our educational system is doing the same. Our courts and often our politicians are involved in the same godless objectives. But all we need to do is to take a good look at our society to see what the consequences are. And nowhere are the tragic results to be seen any clearer than they are in America's homes today. Join us in our study of Romans in our Tuesday Class this year and you will learn in chapter 1 that when people do not want to retain God in their knowledge, God gives them up to the tragic consequences that follow such a way of living.

Let me read to you from the NKJV what Paul wrote in Rom. 1:28-32 about the very situation we are facing in our country today because as a nation we have told God to stay out of our lives. Listen to God's word on this point:

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,

30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same

but also approve of those who practice them (Rom. 1:28-32 - NKJV).

Romans 1 tells us two things about man that most people are inclined to deny, and yet they are absolutely true. The first is that everybody down in their hearts knows that there is a God. The second is that everybody knows that some day they are going to stand before God Who will be their Judge. See Rom. 1:20 and 21, and 32.

Now from Romans 1 we learn that human life and human relationships can not be right, cannot be what we want them to be, unless God is given His rightful place in our lives.

If you are reading Isaiah right now, you are doubtless aware of the many times God said through Isaiah, "I am God, and there is no other." And you can't read God's Word without realizing that Isaiah's God, the only true God, is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we learn from Scripture that Isaiah and Paul and all of the other writers of Scripture wrote under the direction of the Third Person of the Godhead, Who is the Holy Spirit.

We are all under the sovereign authority and power of the Triune God whether we believe it or not. And it is only when our relationship with God is what God wants it to be, that our relationships to each other as human beings will be right. And that is why Paul began Colossians and Ephesians with the Gospel. It is only by faith in Christ that our relationships with each other can be what God intends for them to be. We are all sinners by nature, and we will destroy ourselves if God lets us go. What we all need to know is that our greatest need is for God, and for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the Holy Spirit. So read Colossians 1 and 2 to learn what God has done to save us from our sins, and really to save us from ourselves. Then read chapter 3 to learn how a true Christian is to live. Make all of that truth your own by the grace of God, and then life in your home can really be a foretaste of heaven even here on earth.

This was one major reason that Paul emphasized beginning with chapter 1 that Christ must be preeminent in our lives. He must be first, and pleasing Him must be the first objective with all of us.

And let me say this: When things go wrong in our homes, it is always an indication that things are not really right between us and the Lord. God is

very gracious, and very patient, and very loving. He doesn't mark our sins nor make us pay for everything we do that displeases Him. We can be thankful for that. However, continued rebellion against the Lord will bring us under His judgment. But if we want His greatest blessing, we need to do His will, not try to make Him submit to us.

A young couple came to me many years ago, wanting to get married. The girl was a member of the church I was the pastor of at that time, but I had never met the young man before. I learned later that he had just been released from prison. I was not too sure that the girl was a Christian, but I soon learned that the young man was not a Christian. So I started to talk to him about the Lord and the Gospel. He listened for a few minutes, but I could see that he was not at all happy with what I was saying to him. Finally, he said to me, "What does all of this have to do with marriage? We came to you because we want to get married, not to listen to all of this." I told him that it had everything to do with marriage. But he got up and said some things to me that I can't repeat to you, opened my study door, and slammed it shut as he went out. The young lady was very embarrassed, and apologized for his actions and words. But they went to a pastor on the other side of Portland who married them. I kept up with them through the girl's parents and found out that their marriage didn't last a year. Unfortunately similar stories are all too common. Marriage was instituted by God. He made us male and female. And He actually performed the first marriage when he made Eve and brought her to Adam. So it is reasonable to expect that God would tell us, as He has in His Word, what He intends for marriage and the family to be.

Before we get into the details of our text, and I will only get us started today, let me point out an interesting feature in this passage about marriage and the family, and the relationship between servants and masters.

We know from the parallel passage in Ephesians that "the husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23) meaning that he had authority over his wife. We also know that children are under the authority of their parents as long as they are in the home. And we know that masters had total authority over their servants. Actually the servants had little or no rights. But in each case the wife is mentioned before her husband, the children are mentioned before their fathers, and the servants are mentioned before their masters. If you had been writing this, wouldn't you have mentioned the one with the authority first? Why is it like it is in both Colossians and

Ephesians?

The commentators generally overlook this order given by the Apostle Paul. But obviously there has to be some reason, or even reasons.

One possible answer is that in God's order the least is usually the great. For example, when the disciples on one occasion were discussing who among them was the greatest, the Lord told them, "He that is least among you all, the same shall be great" (Luke 9:48). When James and John and their mother came to the Lord asking that they might be seated at the right hand and the left hand of the Lord when He came into His kingdom, among the words which the Lord spoke to them, were these:

25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25-28).

So I think that it can be said that wives, children, and servants were given a place of special honor. Husbands, fathers, and masters had their place of honor, too, by reason of the position that they held, but in the OT as well as in the NT, the Lord honored those who displayed humility. And we know that pride was one of the major reasons for the judgments of God in OT times.

But I think that there is another reason. The ones in these three pairs of relationships who had the lesser position regarding authority, were really the keys to each relationship. A husband's authority does not amount to much if his wife will not obey him. In the same way, the father's authority can be effective if his children are willing to obey him. And the same is true of a master's authority. It is honored by his servant's obedience.

The husband by his love for his wife, the father by his concern for his children, and the master in his tenderness toward his servant, are all types of Christ.

So there is a special honor bestowed upon all six positions, and God is

glorified when each is acting in accordance with the position that he or she holds. But perhaps the main point that the Apostle Paul was making here beginning with verse 18 of chapter 3, is that true salvation will manifest itself at home, and among those with whom we have the closest relationship. If it is not seen there, then it probably is not genuine salvation. The Gospel changes us individually, and that change will also be seen at home.

While several of us were on the “Grace to You” Cruise with Dr. John MacArthur and several members of his staff which started in Montreal and ended in New York City, we had the privilege not only of hearing Dr. MacArthur as he led us through Romans 8, but we also were blessed to hear Mr. Phil Johnson as he spoke on the ten commandments. As he went through the commandments there was one verse that he referred to several times. And we will come to it in our Sunday evening studies of Psalm 119. It is verse 96. And this is what it tells us:

96 I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

Taking that word “broad” he went on to show that there is a *largeness, a wideness*, to the commandments of Scripture. And so each morning as he discussed each commandment he showed how it was related to other passages of Scripture. He went so fast that it was hard to take notes, but he proved his point each morning, and I was really blessed by what he had to say.

I said all of that to say this: As we go through these verses, I want us to see that although Paul had a specific word for wives, and another for husbands, and so on through the list, yet there is something for all of us in each commandment.

A couple came to see me many years ago who were both graduates of Multnomah. They had been married several years, and had more than one child. But their marriage was in deep trouble, and the husband was the main cause of the trouble. He was so determined to make his wife submissive to him that it was like the Scriptures were completely silent on how a husband should treat his wife. She had tried in every possible way to please him, but he was never satisfied. Even as the three of us sat and talked, he kept turning to her as she was explaining the situation to me, and saying, “Submit, submit, submit!!!”

Now there is no question but that the Scriptures teach that a wife is to be

submissive to her husband. This is seen not only in Ephesians and Colossians, but also in Titus 2:5 and 1 Pet. 3:1 and 5. To be submissive means to place oneself under another to be obedient to them.

But going back to the couple who had come to me, besides overlooking what the Word has to say about a husband's responsibility toward his wife, this man was making two other mistakes. One was that Paul did not tell the husband to make his wife submit. He told wives that they were to be submissive to their husbands. It is not the husband's responsibility to see that his wife is submissive. That is a matter between each wife and the Lord. Actually his wife had done everything possible to show her submission to him, but he could not be satisfied with anything that she had done.

The other mistake he was making was that he was overlooking the fact that *he too* was to show submission to her. This is brought out in the parallel passage in Ephesians. There, just before Paul addressed the wives, he said, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

Luke 2:51 tells us that when Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem to find Jesus when He was just a boy, He returned to Nazareth with them, "and was subject unto them."

In 1 Pet. 2:18 Peter used this word concerning servants, that they were to be submissive to their masters, and not only to those who were "good and gentle, but also to the froward.

But it is in 1 Pet. 5:5-7 that the Spirit of God through Peter has applied this word to all of us. This is what he said:

5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

7 Casting into his care your souls, because he careth for you.

It is not natural for us to submit ourselves to each other. It is not easy for a wife to be submissive to her husband in all things. But in the Christian life we are not talking about what is natural or what is easy for us to do. We are talking about what God wants us to do, and what we can only do by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Naturally we are all proud.

God wants us to be humble. We all are to be submissive to each other, but in the case of wives, God calls upon them to exercise this grace of submission and obedience in special ways as their chief responsibility toward their husbands. And Paul said in Eph. 5:22 that this is to be “as unto the Lord.” In Col. 3:18 it is, “as it is fit in the Lord.” This means as it is consistent with the will of God which is expressed in His Word.

Concl: And so there is a lesson for all of us here, and a special lesson for every wife in the Lord. The main keys to a happy marriage are a humble and submissive wife, and a husband who loves her as Christ loves the church. But we will see more of this next Lord’s Day.