

Mastered by an Exalted Christ
Colossians 3:18 – 4:1
Men's Gathering
March 4, 2016

Round table discussion: What does greatness actually look like for the man of God? What is the key?

Rules for Christian Households: Colossians 3:18–4:1 (ESV)

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. 22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

4 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

There are three things I want to do this morning as we look at this text:

1. Identify an operative principle or thesis that answers our question.
2. Consider the force of this text, what comes before and how does it prepare us/culminate in is these practical imperatives.
3. Consider the particulars – 3 spheres of relationship
 - a. Wives and husbands
 - b. Children and parents
 - c. Servants and masters

Thesis: Redeemed men, God's men, men with new hearts, men with great hearts see themselves as belonging to Another, as owned by another. And thus

live in accord with the One who owns them, the ONE to whom they belong. This idea is captured by the repeated word *kyrios*/Lord--master.

1. Operative principle – simply stated: Great Men are Mastered Men

Keyword: *kyrios* - LORD

Lord – 16x, 9x in these 9 verses, 5x prior:

Colossians 1:3

³ *We always thank God, the Father of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, when we pray for you,*

Colossians 1:10

¹⁰ *so as to walk in a manner **worthy of the Lord**, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*

Colossians 2:6

⁶ *Therefore, as you **received Christ Jesus the Lord**, so walk in him,*

Colossians 3:13

¹³ *bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, **forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.***

Colossians 3:17

¹⁷ *And whatever you do, in word or deed, **do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Key Question: What then does it mean to be a great man of God?

Someone once said: *When God measures the greatness of a man, He puts the tape measure around the heart not the head.* (Sam Crabtree)

Lord means boss, master, owner; every time we see it in this letter, it entails action, doing: thanksgiving, bearing fruit, walking in him, forgiving as he does, doing everything for Christ.

“Great men are men mastered by an exalted Christ!”

This letter puts the spotlight on Christ! Who is he and what has he done?

The Preeminence of Christ

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

*²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² **he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death**, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*

All things created – By Him, through Him, for Him! In Him all things hold together! In everything He is preeminent! He is Lord! Sovereign! Master!

2. The force and momentum of the book up to this point

Paul never strays from the reality of what Christ has done, what he has accomplished, namely, that he has reconciled you in his body! This is the gospel and it forms the ground for this passage. This is a passage loaded with imperatives but all of those coming from the indicatives that have already been given.

This gospel comes to you. You receive it! It is bearing fruit and increasing (1:5-6)

Think about what that means for you! Listen to what Paul says in this letter:

- The Father has qualified you to share an inheritance
- He has delivered you from darkness
- Transferred you into the kingdom of his Son

- In whom you have redemption, the forgiveness of sin
- He has brought you peace by the blood of His cross
- He has reconciled you by his death
- In order to present you holy and blameless
- You have CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory
- You received Christ
- You are rooted and built up in Him
- You are established in the faith
- In him you were circumcised
- You were buried with Him in baptism
- You have been raised with Him through faith
- God has made you alive together with Him
- Having forgiven your trespasses
- Canceling the record of your debt—nailing it to the cross
- You have died and your life is hidden with Christ
- You have been raised with Christ
- And you are seated with him at the right hand of God
- And when he appears, you will appear with Him in glory!
- For you are chosen, holy, beloved!

That is the force and momentum of Colossians up to this point--before Paul gets to these commands! **“God acts first, his work is decisive. Ours is responsive!”**

With that said, now we’re ready for the particulars, the commands and the application.

3. The 3 spheres of relationship – *the oikonomia* (household codes)

- a. Wives and husbands
- b. Children and parents
- c. Servants and masters

A little background: these household codes go back at least 500 years. There are Hellenistic versions that are both similar and different. Aristotle said that “the house was the basis of political structure of the polis—the city/state.” And the

man was the master of his household—of his wife, children, servants—that’s the pagan version.

What Paul writes here has one profound difference from Hellenistic codes: Paul introduces the idea of a greater MASTER! The Lord! And with this idea turns the world upside down—it challenges the social, cultural and political norms of the day. It is no small matter.

Affirming the Lordship of Christ in the household leads to the proclamation of Christ and the gospel. The *oikos* included children, parents, grandparents, servants, friends and even business associates. It was the primary place where the gospel was lived out.

The structure of the passage start with an addressee, then a command and a motivation.

a. Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Following husbands -- God-appointed leadership -- is impossible apart from everything I’ve just said about what Christ has done! The motivation to do this is the Lord, as is fitting to the Lord. The picture is of wives submitting to the Lord and then in love, honoring and submitting to their husbands. The gospel gives the freedom to love and submit as we are called. The same word is used to speak of the Son’s submission to the Father. There is absolutely no sense of inferiority.

Let me ask this simple question, especially since I’m talking to a group of men -- do you make it easy for your wife to follow your leadership? How does one do that?

b. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

It is striking how Paul crystalizes the command to husbands—so simple and yet so substantive. Love—present tense verb—means “maintain the habit of loving.” “Make it your practice to love.”

3 simple ways to love your wife:

- Serve your wife, stop what you're doing and do what she asks
- Observe your wife – study your wife, know what she likes
- Surprise your wife – be intentional in surprising for her

Paul also gives a command by way of the negative: “do not be harsh”

Harsh – sharp, strident, severe, embittering them to you. It must always be avoided—NEVER be harsh.

ILL: when I asked my wife “what’s it like being married to me?” Many years ago I asked my wife this question and was shocked by her answer...

Loving your wife means you are no dictator. You lead by serving. You Love sacrificially! You lead them by giving your life for her! Just as Christ did for you.

You love by being gentle with them, being caring, tender, always looking out for their interests, looking out for their well-being, even when you don't think they deserve it. Love them selflessly, even when they are unlovely! If you are an angry man, then you have to deal with your anger. You have to seek out help from a brother in Christ.

I don't think Paul could raise the bar any higher. It is why I wanted to be sure we started with what Christ has DONE! For only in Christ, with the gospel leading the way, could you ever love your wife this way! The redeeming grace of Christ makes it possible!

The Spirit's work of making the gospel real to the heart weakens the self-centeredness of the soul. Keller (pg.58)

Selfishness will always stand in the way of this kind of love—don't ever doubt it! Self-centeredness is the enemy of every marriage! It is THE foundational problem!

Let's move on to children and parents:

Order of importance: wives first, then children, then work! Some of you have it out of order.

c. Children, obey your parents in everything,

Who – children

What – obey, do what you're told

When – at every point

This implies instruction, which you are teaching your children. They need to be instructed wisely, taking account of their age, and must be taught the fear of God along with respect for their parents. Disobedience is a mark of sinfulness (Rom. 1:30) but obedience is 'well pleasing to the Lord'. Submission of Children to their parents is expected until they reach adulthood (Acts 15:29).

d. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged.

Now a word to fathers. Do not provoke = arouse to anger, irritate, exasperate.

How does this happen? When you respond disproportionately, over respond, or over correct or scorn your children.

What happens when you do this? They become discouraged, despondent, they lose heart, lack spirit. You may even embitter them toward you and create enmity.

Fathers, it means you encourage continually. You build up, every chance you get. You show love and mercy and understanding. The home is a refuge from the discouragement of this world. Make it so.

One author says it this way:

The father's duty to help his children obey him 'in all things' (v. 20). How? By developing a loving and trusting relationship with his sons and daughters. If they respect him they will follow his lead and learn from his godly example. If a father is unjust or too severe he will provoke his children to bitterness, which will produce

discouragement that could lead to permanent enmity. Understanding and mercy are important factors in child rearing so unreasonable demands and overbearing attitudes are to be avoided. Fathers must not lay too many demands on their offspring and they must assure them that they are loved, accepted and valued for themselves and not for what they might become.¹

How are you doing? Men, there is NO place for passive fathers, husbands, workers, bosses!

The last sphere of relationship is between slave and master which has a parallel to worker and boss. I want to draw just a couple of principles and let you move toward discussion.

Colossians 3:22–4:1

²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

***4** Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

e. To the employees

- work wholeheartedly and genuinely
 - Wholehearted – because you are working for Christ
 - Genuinely – not by way of eye-service – not only when the boss is watching, not concerned for outward appearances but with Christ.
 - Having a sincere disposition, with no ulterior motives, being single-minded. Why? Because you fear the Lord.

¹ McNaughton, I. S. (2006). *Opening up Colossians and Philemon* (p. 77). Leominster: Day One Publications.

Christians are to work not simply out of duty, with self-preservation and self-interest in view; rather they are to work 'as to the Lord.'² He gives the reward. He is the reward!

f. To the employers

Employers lead justly, fairly, humbly. Remember you too have a Master

Employers are to give their servants (employees) 'what is just and fair', for they have a heavenly master too! Are the rewards employers give to their workers 'just and fair'? Employees are not to be underpaid but treated with respect, 'knowing that you also have a Master in heaven' (cf. Eph. 6:9).

² McNaughton, I. S. (2006). *Opening up Colossians and Philemon* (p. 78). Leominster: Day One Publications.