

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

- A. An outline of the Epistle to the Colossians
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-14)
 - 2. Doctrinal Instruction (1:15-29)
 - 3. Warnings against false teaching (2:1-23)
 - 4. Instructions on living the Christian life (3:1-4:6)
 - a. Live what you believe (3:1-17)
 - b. Concerning relationships (3:18-4:1)
- B. Review from last week
 - 1. Christians are to practice what they preach by living what they believe.
 - 2. There is no room for the old life once one possesses new life in Christ.
 - 3. Do what pleases the Lord with thanksgiving.
- C. Preview of Colossians 3:18-4:1
 - 1. T. Constable, *Paul next set forth certain principles to guide his readers in their most important interpersonal relationships. He did this to enable them to understand what behavior is consistent with union with Christ in these relationships.*
 - 2. M. Anders, *The false teachers promoted ideas which made spirituality the possession of the special few who tapped into "higher" knowledge, engaged in mystical experiences, or conformed to a code of rules. Paul points believers in another direction. Spirituality is nothing grand, romantic, or impossible. It is submitting to the supremacy of Christ which will transform our character and revolutionize our relationships.*

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1, CONCERNING RELATIONSHIPS

- A. Instructions for those who are married (3:18-19)
 - 1. Concerning wives (18), ***Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.***
 - a. *submit*
 - 1) It means *to subject oneself, to obey.*
 - a) 1 Peter 2:13-14, *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*
 - b) Ephesians 5:22, *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*
 - 2) It means *subordination, not subjugation.*
 - a) This subordination is based on God's directive in the order of creation.
 - 1] Genesis 2:18, *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*
 - 2] 1 Timothy 2:13, *For Adam was formed first, then Eve;*
 - 3] Genesis 3:16, *To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be toward your husband, but he shall rule over you."*
 - 4] 1 Peter 3:5-6a, *For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham...*
 - 5] It is a subordination specific to the marriage relationship, not all women to all men.
 - b) It pictures the order within the Godhead.
 - 1] Christ submits to the Father.
 - 2] 1 Corinthians 11:3, *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*
 - c) It pictures the order within Christ's body, the church, Ephesians 5:22-24, *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*
 - d) T. Constable, *This subjection rests on divinely prescribed authority, not on any inherent inferiority in spirituality, intelligence, worth, or anything else.*

- b. *as is fitting in the Lord*
 - 1) *fitting means to be right, proper, appropriate.*
 - 2) There is a moral emphasis.
 - a) The controlling factor is the Lord's will.
 - b) One's responsibility to obey government (and a husband) is commanded so long as that which is demanded does not conflict with specific scriptural commands.
- c. J. McGee, *This is for the purpose of order in the home. This is not for the purpose of producing a browbeating husband. I do not believe that God intends for a wife to submit to an unsaved husband who beats her or orders her to do things contrary to her walk with the Lord.*

2. Concerning husbands (19), ***Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.***

- a. Love is the basis for leadership in the home.
 - 1) It is *agape* love.
 - a) The emphasis is *deep appreciation and high regard.*
 - b) It demands doing what is best for others.
 - 2) Examples of *agape* love
 - a) Romans 5:8, *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
 - b) Ephesians 5:25. *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,*
 - 3) N. Geisler, *So in a maturing marriage the husband exercises compassionate care and his wife responds in willing submission to this loving leadership.*
- b. There is no room for bitterness by the husband for his wife.
 - 1) *harsh* means *to have bitter resentment or hatred toward someone else.*
 - 2) A husband must not allow a bitter attitude to develop because of a wife's lack of submission.
 - 3) T. Constable, *This attitude is a specific and all too common manifestation of lack of love.*
- 3. G. Osborne, *It is my conclusion that the model of mutual submission governs both the headship of the husband and the voluntary submission of the wife, and that love drives both as they live out this relationship.*

B. Instructions for families (3:20-21)

1. Concerning children (20), ***Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.***

- a. The responsibility of children is to obey their parents.
 - 1) Obey carries the force of submission.
 - 2) It is a readiness to listen to and carry out parental instructions.
- b. Obedience is to be total except for that which displeases the Lord.
 - 1) The word for *children* means *youth not babies*, emphasizing submission based on ability to differentiate right and wrong.
 - 2) Note Acts 5:29, *But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."*
- c. Obeying parents is commanded by God.
 - 1) It pleases the Lord, Ephesians 6:1, *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*
 - 2) It carries a promise from God, Exodus 20:12, *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*
 - 3) J. McGee, *Children are to obey their parents. They are to honor their parents all their lives, but when they are children they are to obey them.*

2. Concerning parents (21), ***Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.***

- a. *Fathers*
 - 1) Some believe Paul meant to include mothers even though he used the word fathers, as in Proverbs 1:8, *Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching,*
 - 2) Most believe Paul was emphasizing the authority of the father in the home.
 - a) T. Constable, *While children must obey both parents, the father has the primary responsibility for his children as head of the household. For this reason Paul addressed the fathers here.*
 - b) G. Osborne, *In Colossians 3:21, he explicitly mentions only fathers (parents are addressed in verse 20) because in the Greek and Jewish worlds discipline in the home was the father's sole provenance.*

- b. *do not provoke, lest they become discouraged*
 - 1) It means to make someone *resentful, bitter*.
 - a) N. Geisler, *Fathers should not presume on this obedience and embitter their children by continual agitation and unreasonable demands.*
 - b) T. Constable, *What is in view here is the habitual provoking of children by insensitive parents. Some provocation is necessary in disciplining, but ceaseless irritation causes children to become sullen, listless, and discouraged.*
 - 2) G. Osborne on discouragement, *The reference here is to a misuse of authority that ends up frustrating and finally angering the children, with the result that they “become discouraged.” This connotes not only an emotional response but also a loss of will. There are two types of child abuse—physical and psychological—and the latter can be just as devastating as the former. God charges all parents with the responsibility of helping their children develop and maintain a healthy view of themselves*

C. Instructions for slaves and masters (3:22-4:1)

1. Introductory notes

- a. This section is longer for several reasons.
 - 1) This letters to Colossae and Philemon were delivered by Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave.
 - 2) There may have been a large number of slaves in the Colossian church, note T. Constable, *The friction inherent in this situation probably called for extended comments on master-slave relationships in the body of Christ and in this church particularly.*
 - 3) Other passages on slaves/masters are 1 Timothy 6:1-2; I Peter 2:18-25.
- b. Paul’s position on slavery
 - 1) T. Constable, *Note also that Paul did not argue for the abolition of slavery but urged Christians to behave as Christians within that social structure...Paul’s view was this. It is more important for Christians to carry out our mission as Christians in whatever social conditions we find themselves than it is for us to make changing those conditions our primary concern.*
 - 2) W. Wiersbe, *Paul’s view was this. It is more important for Christians to carry out our mission as Christians in whatever social conditions we find themselves than it is for us to make changing those conditions our primary concern.*
 - 3) 1 Corinthians 7:20-22, *Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ.*
- c. Comparisons
 - 1) J. Dunn, *Slaves in the Roman Empire were similar to domestic servants in Victorian Britain.*
 - 2) The principles in this section may be applied to Christian employees in the workplace.

2. Concerning slaves (22-25)

- a. Maintain a proper attitude that shows reverence for the Lord (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.***
 - 1) *bondservants*
 - a) It means *one who is bound, the state of being completely controlled by someone.*
 - b) W. Vine, *one who gives himself up to the will of another*
 - c) It is translated as servant in Matthew 8:9 and slave in Mark 10:44.
 - 2) *obey in everything*
 - a) This is identical to the command to children in verse 20.
 - b) Slaves are to submit to their earthly masters.
 - c) In spiritual matters, the slave and his master were brothers in Christ, as we will see in verses 23-24.

- 3) A slave must remember that he is ultimately serving the Lord.
 - a) His attitude is not to do what might impress others.
 - 1] *eye-service*
 - a] It means *to serve with a view to impressing others.*
 - b] It is one who wants to look good only when the master is around.
 - c] J. McGee, *Eye-service is a word peculiar in the New Testament to the writings of Paul. He means, "Don't keep your eye on the clock. Keep your eye on Christ. He is the One whom you are serving." That is the way you ought to do your job.*
 - 2] *people-pleasers*
 - a] It means *to cause people to be pleased.*
 - b] It is one who wants to please men and not God.
 - c] G. Osborne, *Believers are to please God, not people, and they are to serve superiors in the workplace for the glory of God rather than for personal advantage.*
 - b) His attitude is to do what pleases the Lord.
 - 1] *with sincerity of heart*
 - a] It means *with a heart which seeks only one purpose.*
 - b] Ephesians 6:5, *Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,*
 - c] N. Geisler, *This obedience is to be with sincerity of heart, not simply when their masters are watching them or to win their favor.*
 - 2] *fearing the Lord*
 - a] To fear the Lord means to give reverence because service is a part of worship which is a Christian's calling.
 - b] It also has an element of fear since we will all stand before God and give account of our lives of service.
 - 1} Romans 14:10, *Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;*
 - 2} 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*
 - 3] J. McGee, *The idea here is not to fear the boss, but to fear God.*
- b. There is only one true Master (23-25), ***Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.***
 - 1) A Christian's work is his ministry to the Lord.
 - a) T. Constable, *Slaves should do their work primarily for the Lord. This view of work transforms a worker's attitudes and performance. Even the most servile work thereby becomes a ministry and an act of worship.*
 - b) G. Osborne, *This intrinsic motivation of serving the Lord with all their hearts enables slaves even in bad situations to continue to serve well.*
 - 2) A Christian will be rewarded for his faithfulness by the Lord Christ.
 - a) Ephesians 6:8, *knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.*
 - b) J. Dillow, *The inheritance is a reward which is received as 'wages' for work done. Nothing could be plainer. The context is speaking of the return a man should receive because of his work, as in an employer-employee relationship.*
 - c) These rewards are also called crowns, Philippians 4:1, *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*
 - 3) Paul gave a specific command to slaves.
 - a) It was to *serve the Lord Christ.*
 - b) G. Osborne, *In a temporary human sense, of course, they serve their human owners, but the lordship of Christ is paramount. Everything slaves do in the household they do as Christians, and thus for the glory of God and Christ.*

- 4) A Christian can serve a difficult master because Christ is just and will right all wrongs.
 - a) Mistreatment by a master is seen by the Lord.
 - b) G. Osborne, *In this world injustice will occur, but the vindication of his suffering people is certain, and God will repay.*

3. Concerning masters (4:1), ***Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.***
 - a. Masters are to not abuse their authority.
 - 1) Paul gave two ways a master must treat his slaves.
 - a) *justly*
 - 1) It means to *do in accordance with what God requires.*
 - 2) God is the standard by which a master should deal with a slave.
 - b) *fairly*
 - 1) It means to be *equal.*
 - 2) The equality corresponds to treating the slave the way the master would want to be treated.
 - b. Masters are accountable to God.
 - 1) They are treated fairly by God Who is their example.
 - 2) N. Geisler, *If employers of nonslaves today manifested this kind of compassionate and impartial care for their employees, certainly their employees' motivation to work would radically improve.*
 - 3) G. Osborne, *No, Paul did not call for the end of slavery or the manumission of all slaves, but he did challenge owners to consider their slaves as equals before the Lord and to treat them rightly at all times. This in itself would produce a social revolution and, in time, help to undermine the institution of slavery.*

4. G. Osborne, *By extension, the principles Paul outlines in this passage apply to modern employment situations. Subordinates owe their bosses respect and obedience, and employers owe their workers justice and fairness. Too often in work relationships, there is a prevailing spirit of animosity and power politics. On both sides, such an attitude is a sin. God demands teamwork and mutual respect in the workplace.*

CONCLUSION

- A. All interpersonal relationships need a divine perspective.
- B. Everyone is equal in the Lord but there are levels of subordination in the world.
- C. Regardless of who you are or what you do, if you are a Christian, serve the Lord Christ.