



SERMON NOTES

US N^o. 141

Date: May 4th, 2014

Title: Reconciled relationships

#7 in the Series on the Letter to the Colossians

1. Review

- a. Paul's ethical teaching flows from a moral vision rather than moral rules. He is much less interested in the observance of rules, although he provides them, than he is in being Christian.
- b. Paul's perspective on human sexuality comes from a new perspective on the body, which is not only an instrument to be used for God's glory rather than for sexual perversion (*cf.* 1 Cor. 6:19-20) but as the place of God's final justification where the body will be raised incorruptible. (*cf.* 1 Cor. 6:17; 15:35-49)
- c. Christianity is not a cult of the individual; instead, God's grace transforms people to live in right relationship with one another.
- d. For Paul, the critical decision for any individual is how to become a member of God's people in Christ. Therefore, the primary fruit of an individual's faith is how the believer relates to others who belong to the congregation of God's people.
- e. Reconciled relationships within the faith community bear witness to God's triumph over society's corrupting influence.
- f. Paul has addressed the basis of his ethics, theological truths, now he moves to specific relationships. Most people appeal to the frailties of their fallen humanity or the utter secularity of the culture to explain why they do not follow Christ. Worse, they may construct a theology of grace that considers perfected love of God and neighbor a real impossibility for us; divine grace is not able to transform us into new creatures after all. This is exactly what Paul argues against; the problem with bad theology is that it creates a faulty perception of the real world.

2. The family under the new covenant. The issue at stake is not gender but how disciples, whether male or female, are oriented toward the Lord.

- a. **Wives;** *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."* (*cf.* Col. 3:18)
 - i. The word *"submit"* is a Greek word borrowed from the military that literally means *"to be under in rank."* It speaks of the way that an army is organized among levels of rank and one is obligated to respect those in higher rank.
 1. The idea of submission has nothing to do with someone being smarter, better or more talented. It has everything to do with a God-appointed order. *"Anyone who has served in the armed forces knows that 'rank' has to do with order and authority, not with value or ability."* (Wiersbe)
 2. *"The equality of men and women before the Lord, of which Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, has not been retracted: but neither does it mean identity of role or function."* (Wright)
 3. The submission (*hupotasso*) by the wife is meant to be voluntary.

- ii. Wives are called to submit to husbands, not women to men.
- iii. The propriety of the wife's submission to her husband or of the husband's love for his wife is gauged by the new realities found in the Lord. Not only is God's triumph demonstrated in the death and resurrection of the Lord Christ, but in him God's people now experience transformation from vice to virtue and from death to life. In this sense, then, actions "proper" for those who live in the Lord Christ must bear witness to God's triumph.
- iv. The phrase, "*...as is fitting to the Lord,*" is crucial
 - 1. Wrong interpretations
 - a. "*A wife should submit to her husband as if he were God himself.*" This sets the extent of submission to be as far and as high as that towards God himself. But in no place does the Scripture teach an unqualified, without exception, submission - except to God and God alone.
 - b. "*I'll submit to him as long as he does what the Lord wants.*" This sets the limit of submission to be only so far as she agrees. It then becomes the wife's job to decide what the Lord wants which degenerates into submission when she agrees with him that he's made the right decisions and going about that out the right way; when he makes a wrong decision, he isn't in the Lord, so she shouldn't submit to him then. However, everyone submits to others when they agree, it's when there is a disagreement that submission is tested.
 - 2. Right interpretation. "*As is fitting to the Lord*" defines the motive of a wife's submission. When wives submit to their husbands, it's a part of their duty to the Lord, because it is an expression of their very submission to the Lord. It honors God's Word and His order of authority and is part of their Christian duty and discipleship.
- v. When a wife doesn't obey this word, she doesn't just fall short as a wife she falls short as a follower of Jesus Christ. Wives aren't expected to submit because they are the submissive type. They are expected to submit because it is fitting in the Lord.
 - 1. A woman should take great care in how she chooses her husband, better first look for a man you can respect.
 - 2. There are certainly cases when a wife should not submit:
 - a. When the husband asks the wife to sin, she must not submit.
 - b. When the husband is medically incapacitated, insane, or under the influence of mind altering substances, the wife may not submit.
 - c. When the husband is violent and physically threatening, the wife may not submit.
 - d. When the husband breaks the marriage bond by adultery, they wife does not need to submit to her husband being in an adulterous relationship.
- b. **Husbands;** "*Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*" (cf. Col. 3:19)
 - i. Although wives are to submit to their husbands, husbands are not excused to act a tyrant over their wives. The word "love" is the Greek word "*agape*" which is significant because it places the husband under an obligation. "*Agapao does not denote affection or romantic*

attachment; it rather denotes caring love, a deliberate attitude of mind that concerns itself with the well-being of the one loved." (Vaughan) The word has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another. *Agape*:

1. Is without changing.
 2. Is self-giving, and gives without demanding or expecting re-payment.
 3. Is given to the unlovable or unappealing.
 4. Loves even when it is rejected.
 5. Does not demand or expect repayment from the love given; it gives because it loves and does not love in order to receive.
- ii. In essence, Paul is saying, *"Husband, continually practice self-denial for the sake of your wife."*
 - iii. The husband may justify his harsh or unloving attitude and actions towards his wife, but he's not. No matter how the wife has been towards the husband *Agape* loves even when there are obvious and glaring deficiencies, even when the receiver is unworthy of the love.
 - iv. Harshness is a vice that breaks relationships.
- c. **Children;** *"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."* (cf. Col. 3:20) Social propriety within the Christian family is determined by the Lord, not by the dominant values and typical behaviors of the surrounding secular order.
- i. Paul has in mind children who are still in their parents' household and under their authority. They must not only honor their father and mother (cf. Eph. 6:2), but they must also obey them, and obey them in all things.
 1. When a child is grown and out of his parents' household, he is no longer under the same obligation of obedience, but the obligation to honor your father and mother remains.
 - ii. Again, Paul clarifies the intention behind the behavior by saying, *"for this is well pleasing to the Lord."* When a child respects his parent's authority, he is respecting God's order of authority in other areas of life.
 - iii. The first person of the Trinity is the Father and the second person the Son. Inherent in those titles is a relationship of authority and submission to authority. The Father exercises authority over the Son, and the Son submits to the Father's authority – this is the very nature and being of God.
 - iv. Implicit in this discussion is that the children are equally disciples of Christ who must also live out the reconciled relationship.
- d. **Fathers;** *"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."* (cf. Col. 3:21)
- i. What is *"proper"* between the child and parent is to be founded on the Christ's terms rather than on society's. Neither the child nor the parent should hold the other hostage to society's values and expectations; neither should seek self-justification in terms of what is *"pleasing"* to or expected of their own peers. Parents often project their ambitions or those of their friends on their children, trying to remake them in the image of their personal failures. But

parenting is a sacred task; as disciples of Christ, Christian parents seek to raise up children in the image of Jesus.

- ii. Through the scriptures, children's value is elevated by the command to not *embitter*.
 - iii. Parenting within the Christian home requires a balance: maintaining the children's obedience without alienating them from the faith.
 - iv. The differences in submission between the wife and child to the husband/father.
 - 1. The change of the verbal idea from submission (*hypotasso*) of the wife, which only sometimes means obedience, to the more explicit word for obedience (*hypakouo*) of the child.
 - 2. The change of verbal voice from middle, which implies that the wife's submission is voluntary, to an active imperative, which implies the child's unquestioning obedience.
 - v. However, demanding obedience without love, or conditioning love upon obedience, imperils the child's formation, because it alienates him or her from all nurturing relationships with God, family and community.
 - vi. Paul addresses the fathers because they are the authority within the home, however, the exhortation and counsel can easily apply to mothers.
3. The workplace under the new covenant. During this time, bondservants and masters would have formed a fourth arena within the household, but most commentators now draw parallels with the workplace.
- a. **Employees;** *"Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality."* (cf. Col. 3:22-25)
 - i. It's critical to note that first century Roman slaves' status and experience were not the same as those of antebellum American slaves. While they share the general similarity that all slaves are mastered by their owner, linking these two slave institutions without regard for their important dissimilarities may lead to distorted interpretation.
 - 1. Roman slaves were often treated with some human dignity and beatings do not seem to be as regular a practice as it was in America. Slaves could marry, accumulate wealth, purchase their own freedom, run a business, etc. Cicero noted that a slave could usually be set free within seven years; in any case, under Roman law a slave would normally be set free by age 30. The revolution by Spartacus in 73BC changed some of this for Western empire slaves, but Eastern empire slaves had better conditions.
 - 2. By the first century, as much as two thirds of the Roman Empire were slaves, which is down from the 90% previously. By the first century, the number of slaves were being freed was so high that Caesar had to write up laws that governed the procedure.
 - ii. Scholars are sometimes puzzled that Paul devotes so much of the Colossian code to slaves. Paul is most likely responding to the social world of the Colossians' congregation which may

have been made up of slaves and slave owners. Both groups have been shaped by a society that promotes slavery in order to maintain Rome's economic and military viability.

- iii. Paul uses this slave-master motif to highlight a moral dilemma faced by many in their Christian discipleship: what does it mean to serve two masters and who is it that reigns where we live and work? Especially in the modern workplace where we are faced with the culture of ambition to have a career and to move ahead in competition with other workers. Jesus spoke against having “*two masters*” (cf. Mt. 6:24), and Paul presents here a clear exhortation that the true disciple, who might indeed have both earthly and heavenly masters, must follow the lead of a mind set on things above.
- iv. Paul’s admonition conforms to cultural tradition of the first century in regard to household slaves and masters. However, Paul adds the exhortation that “*whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men*” which changes the reason for serving to be a witness of the Lord Christ. Paul argues that a lifestyle focused on Christ will transform even our ordinary tasks into acts of worship, moving us to do our work even better.
- v. What motivates a worker to work well?
 - 1. Perhaps we are motivated by to look good to our employers and please them. Yet Paul exhorts us, “*obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.*”
 - 2. Perhaps we are motivated by the promise of payment (*money or respect*) for our labor. Again Paul exhorts us, “*do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*”
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- b. **Employers;** “*Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*” (cf. Col. 4:1)
 - i. Paul has already described the sociology of the Christian community located by God's grace in Christ, which makes “*slave and free*” equal because they are both in Christ and he in them. (cf. Col. 3:11)
 - ii. Paul’s instruction is for the master to provide slaves with what is right and fair, something any virtuous person would do
 - iii. Although other codes in the ancient world also encouraged the humane treatment of slaves, the issue for Paul is where one finds the moral competency to do what the code outlines. The necessary virtue to do what is right and fair belongs to the “*new creatures*” found in Christ.
 - iv. Paul's teaching also presses the Christological incentive behind such behavior: you know that you also have a Master in heaven therefore mind the things above. The relationship between earthly masters and the heavenly Master provides the moral impetus for just treatment of household workers.
 - v. If the phrase “*Master in heaven*” alludes to Col. 3:1-4, as many suppose, then it conveys an eschatological meaning as well. According to the Jewish moral tradition, inhumane

treatment of slaves would bring down the Lord Almighty's wrath on Judgment Day (*cf.* James 5:1-5)

- vi. The Christian master, transformed by God's grace, will naturally treat slaves fairly and will therefore appear with Christ in glory. (*cf.* Col. 3:4)

4. Take-aways

- a. We are grafted in Christ and have new life
- b. We are new creatures in Christ
- c. Christianity is about community
- d. God seeks reconciled families
 - i. Wives, voluntarily submit to your husband
 - ii. Husbands, sacrificially love your wife
 - iii. Children, obey in all things
 - iv. Fathers (parents), do not discourage
- e. God seeks reconciled workplaces
 - i. Employees, work as to the Lord
 - ii. Employers, be just and fair