

# Colossians - Interpersonal Relationships

by Mariano Di Gangi

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of submission, love, obedience, and self-giving in interpersonal relationships, as seen in Colossians 3:18-4:1.*

**Duration:** 27:35

**Scripture:** Colossians 3:18-24

**Topics:** "Relationships"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of fulfilling our obligations and duties to one another, both in human relationships and in our relationship with God. The Apostle Paul's teachings are highlighted, as he connects ordinary domestic duties to our service to the Lord. The preacher emphasizes that our work should be done with integrity and diligence, as if we are doing it for the Lord himself. The sermon then delves into specific instructions for wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters, emphasizing the importance of submission, love, obedience, and fairness in these relationships.

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## Transcript

Let us continue to worship God as we listen with reverence to what is written in his inspired word, the letter of Paul to the Colossians, the third chapter, beginning to read at verse 18. The apostle has reminded us that if we are rightly connected with Jesus Christ, the life of God flows through to us and we become new persons. New persons who put away anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying and deceit.

New persons who will show compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. And having stated all that, he now gets down to particular cases. He applies these great truths of God's renewing work to our interpersonal relationships.

And so we come to Colossians 3, beginning to read at verse 18. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything and do it not only when their eye is on you or to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone

who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong and there is no favoritism.

Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a master in heaven. Now at first glance, these might seem like verses of scripture totally inappropriate for an occasion on which we break bread together and celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But if this sacrament has nothing at all to tell us about the way that we should deal with each other, we are about to engage in a meaningless, frivolous, trivial ritual.

For everything we do and everything we say must be viewed in the light of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, especially our interpersonal relationships. Now there are several things that must be stated before we come to comment specifically on any part of our text for today. And the first thing that we should have clearly fixed in our minds is that here we are not dealing with subjective opinion, but with divine revelation.

We are dealing with the authority of one whom our Lord has directly and personally committed commissioned as one of his official spokesmen. This is not a subjective opinion which we can take or leave with impunity. This is divine revelation, which is part of the scripture given by inspiration of God and therefore authoritative and profitable for each of us.

The second thing that we should bear in mind is that here we not only have divine revelation, but we have an emphasis on duties. Our age is the great age of rights. People clamor for their rights.

People want the assurance of their rights. And this is right. But the emphasis here is put on duties rather than rights.

Why? Because if you and I fulfill our duties toward each other, each of us will have our rights safeguarded. And therefore the observance of duty is basic to the ensuring of rights. The only real right to which we should be entitled is the freedom to do our duty and fulfill our obligations to one another.

Not only do we have here an emphasis on duties rather than rights, but we have an emphasis on reciprocal responsibilities. The responsibilities of wives to their husbands and of husbands to their wives, of children to their parents and of parents to their children, of servants to their masters and of masters to their servants. This is not a unilateral affair.

This is a reciprocal matter in which each must fulfill obligations and render duties to the other. And the fourth and final qualification that we must make at the start of our study is that here we have something that is not merely human, but something that is viewed in the light of the divine. For over and over again, the apostle Paul takes the most ordinary domestic duties and he relates them to the Lord, to the Lord in heaven.

Whatever we do, we must do as unto the Lord. It is not merely a horizontal relationship, but a relationship vertically that rises up to him as well. Now bearing these things in mind, we come to make some comments on the individual phrases of the text.

And we begin with something that sort of grates on contemporary ears. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. And the Greek verb here translated submit was originally a military term.

It had to do with rank. It had to do with a willingness to carry out orders. And the apostle takes that word and uses it with reference to the ordering, the well-ordering of the family, knowing that unless you have order, you have disorder, you have chaos.

Any team that tries to play with 11 quarterbacks instead of one will do as well as the Toronto Maple Leafs. And the comparison between the Maple Leafs and a football team is that neither of them plays hockey. The matter of submission is not one that has to do with inferiority on the part of women, but something that is necessary for the well-ordering of the family situation.

There is no implied inferiority. Our Bible begins with Genesis and our Bible begins with Genesis 1 and in Genesis 1, we are told that he made them male and female in his image and that to male and female, he gave the creation mandate to develop, replenish, and subdue the earth. So there is no implied inferiority at all.

And they are both candidates for redemption. For in Christ, there is neither male nor female. They have equal standing before him and are equally recipients of his grace if they extend the open, empty hand of their personal faith.

So it's not out of inferiority that a wife is asked to submit, but for the well-ordering, a body can only have one head. And it is a voluntary submission. The husband is giving no mandate to subdue his wife, but the wife is asked voluntarily to render submission for the well-ordering of the family structure.

It is a voluntary, not a coerced submission, which is here enjoined by apostolic authority. And in the letter to the Ephesians, the apostle resorts to a comparison. He draws an analogy.

Wives, what I have in mind is the relationship between husband and wife that is parallel to the relationship between Christ and his church. Christ does not coerce his church. Christ loves his church, and the church, responding to that love, willingly submits to his headship, is nurtured, protected, and directed by him.

Moreover, letting scripture help us to interpret scripture, we know from what is written in 1 Peter chapter 3 that a wife's willing submission and loyalty to and cooperation with her husband has an evangelistic aspect to it. For the apostle Peter tells us that wives who carry out the recommendation that is given in scripture, made by the quality of their lives and not merely the quantity of their words, win their husbands for Jesus Christ. And so he begins with a word to the wives, but he immediately follows that with a word to husbands.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. What is required by scripture is nothing more and nothing less than a self-giving love. And this is the kind of love that is exemplified by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and dramatized before our eyes in bread that is broken and a cup that is outpoured.

We know this from what the apostle says in the Ephesian letter, which in many cases runs parallel to Colossians and fills in some of the gaps. Husbands, love your wives. He says that in both places, but he goes a step further in the Ephesian epistle as Christ loved the church.

And how did he love the church? By giving himself for its highest good. That's the positive side. Husbands, love your wives.

And the negative is be not harsh, be not bitter against them. And the term that is translated harsh is one that can also be translated bitter. And in the scriptures, it's used to describe a plant that is totally inedible or water that is absolutely undrinkable.

Husbands are asked by apostolic authority to conform to God's pattern of love, not harshness, of self-giving rather than self-gratification at the expense of the personhood of the other. And that is where

the injunctions given in the preceding context come into play, where the apostle says that it's totally incongruous for a person to claim to be a Christian and yet to be mastered by anger, rage, malice, slander, abuse of speech, everything that is characteristic of the old self-centered nature. A husband who has been born again and becomes a new creature in Christ must love his wife as Christ loved the church and must put away every tendency to egocentricity expressed in bitterness and harshness.

And here again, scripture interprets scripture, and the apostle Peter reminds us that men and women are together heirs of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled reserved for them in heaven. And he reminds men that one of the factors in their prayer life is their relationship to their wives, that men who are out of harmony with their wives cannot possibly delude themselves into supposing that they still have a wonderful relationship with the living God. And the reason why sometimes our prayers have wings of lead and get no higher than our lips is because we are out of charity with those nearest and dearest to us.

Let's examine our hearts and see whether or not that is not really true. Our prayers are hindered when, instead of loving, we are bitter. And by the same token, when we put away all bitterness as something unworthy of our new creation and we love after the teaching of scripture and the example of the Savior, our spirituality will be deepened and our prayer life, unhindered, will develop in the path of perfection.

Husbands and wives, parents and children, children, obey your parents. And it's interesting that the word translated obey is a compound which includes in it listening and doing what you've heard. It's as though by obedience the child is echoing the words of the parent to hear and to respond willingly and obediently.

This is something that should be done because it is pleasing to the Lord. And this is something that should be done because it is right in the eyes of God. And here again, it is Jesus Christ who provides us with the perfect pattern.

Remember what the Heavenly Father said when the heavens were opened at the time of our Lord's baptism? This is my beloved son. With him, I am well pleased. And again, upon the holy mount, the mount of transfiguration, there is heard the voice of the glory of God saying, this is my beloved son.

With him, I am well pleased. Why? Because that son was willing to listen to the father's voice. Why? Because that son was willing to do all that the father asked of him.

Why? Because he was willing to humble himself and make himself of no reputation and take upon him the form of a servant and be obedient unto death, the death of the cross. By the obedience of that son, all of us who are children of God learn the way of obedience to our Heavenly Father. And we discover the pattern which cannot be found in an age of contemporary rebellion as to how we ought to live in our relationship to parents as dependent minor children.

But then the word is given to parents and particularly to fathers, since they are supposed to be heads of the household. And the word that is given there is very straightforward. Do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged.

How are children embittered? When parents fail to give a necessary word of commendation, when no appreciation is ever expressed for any kind of achievement, when the wrongs that have been committed are grudgingly forgiven or not forgiven at all, when partiality is shown toward one child over against another, leaving scars and low self-esteem and breeding resentment for years. That is the kind of attitude that breaks the child's spirit, discourages and dispirits the child, and the child comes to the conclusion

there's no pleasing my parents no matter what I do. God forbid that that should ever be said of any of us who have the responsibility of not only bringing children to the font, but leading them to the Lord.

And here again, from the fuller statement in Ephesians 6, we get the supplement to Colossians 3. Not only ought fathers to avoid embittering their children and breaking them through discouragement of constant fault-finding without ever a word of appreciation or encouragement or counsel, but they ought to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by precepts that are instilled, by prayers that are offered, and by a personal example that is indelibly inscribed upon the character of the young. What are we as parents teaching the next generation about values? What are we teaching them about the use or abuse of money? What attitudes are we giving to them on the question of race? What are we teaching our children as to the way in which they ought to face sickness, temptation, and death? What view of the Church of Jesus Christ do our children get because of what we say or fail to say? We are all of us teaching by what we speak and the attitudes that we betray. It's not merely a matter of avoiding embittering the next generation, but positively of teaching and of imparting values that are in keeping with the word of the God we profess to trust.

And now to conclude, a word that concerns slaves and masters. And you might feel that this is totally irrelevant since at long last the institution of slavery has been abolished and we recognize neither slavery nor masters in that ancient sense. And yet the principles that are given here are valid and are applicable to relationships between employers and employees.

Employees are given a directive as to how they ought to do their daily work. Things such as neatness, punctuality, diligence, competence, honesty. These are the things that matter to carry out the valid principle, the abiding principle that is enshrined in our text.

Tell me, what good is it to whip out the four spiritual laws or give people the ABCs of salvation and constantly bug them about the matter of sin and repentance at every lunch hour and then be negligent and lazy and incompetent and free and easy with the truth on the job? Scripture is exceedingly clear that the way we do our work is not merely a matter of earning a paycheck or putting in time. It is something that we do as unto the Lord, and this gives dignity to the most menial job and this gives a sacred dimension to the most profane occupation if it is one that is honest. And those who employ labor are to remember that what they owe their workers is not charity, but justice.

Give to your workers that which is just, that which is fair, that which is equitable. If they have helped to create profits, they should be accordingly rewarded and encouraged by sharing in the fruit of their toil. So both employees and employers are asked to remember that they have a master over them who will bring both reward and retribution.

Let us never forget that we have a Lord, we have a master who is over us in heaven. The Christ whose death we commemorate, the redemption that we celebrate, does not end with Good Friday. It goes beyond Easter Sunday.

It goes onward to the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God as Lord and Christ. And today we do not so much ask him to come down from heaven and be in our midst, but to lift us up on wings of faith and draw us upward to where he is at God's right hand. This is a time in which we remember the death of Jesus and the risen Lord who as our host invites us to be his guests at his table.

Let us pray. Lord, you are indeed our Savior and our Master. Grant unto us a listening ear and a believing heart and obedient hands and feet that we may do everything as unto the Lord, living for the praise and for the glory of him who by his grace saves us, looses us from our sins.

Prepare our hearts that we may worthily eat and drink of this supper of our Lord. In his name we pray. Amen.

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