

Colossians 3:18-25

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on Colossians 3:18-25 emphasizes the importance of love, submission, and mutual respect in family and work relationships as reflections of Christ's teachings.

Scripture: Colossians 3:18-24, Colossians 4:1

Topics: "Family Relationships", "Christian Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships within families and between masters and servants, emphasizing the principles of submission, love, obedience, and fairness. He highlights the reciprocal responsibilities of wives to submit and husbands to love without bitterness, children to obey their parents, fathers to avoid discouraging their children, and servants to serve with sincerity and fear of the Lord. Chrysostom explains that these instructions are given to promote peace and virtue within the community, reflecting the teachings found in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Timothy.

Transcript

Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged. Servants, obey in all things them that are your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord: whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that from the Lord you shall receive the recompense of the inheritance: ye serve the Lord Christ. For he that does wrong shall receive again for the wrong that he has done: and there is no respect of persons with God. Colossians 4:1 Masters, render unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Why does he not give these commands everywhere, and in all the Epistles, but only here, and in that to the Ephesians, and that to Timothy, and that to Titus? Because probably there were dissensions in these cities; or probably they were correct in other respects, so that it was expedient they should hear about these things. Rather, however, what he says to these, he says to all. Now in these things also this Epistle bears great resemblance to that to the Ephesians, either because it was not fitting to write about these things to men now at peace, who needed to be instructed in high doctrines as yet lacking to them, or because that for persons who had been comforted under trials, it were superfluous to hear on these subjects. So that I conjecture, that in this place the Church was now well-grounded, and that these things

are said as in finishing.

Ver. 18. Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

That is, be subject for God's sake, because this adorns you, he says, not them. For I mean not that subjection which is due to a master, nor yet that alone which is of nature, but that for God's sake.

Ver. 19. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

See how again he has exhorted to reciprocity. As in the other case he enjoins fear and love, so also does he here. For it is possible for one who loves even, to be bitter. What he says then is this. Fight not; for nothing is more bitter than this fighting, when it takes place on the part of the husband toward the wife. For the fightings which happen between beloved persons, these are bitter; and he shows that it arises from great bitterness, when, says he, any one is at variance with his own member. To love therefore is the husband's part, to yield pertains to the other side. If then each one contributes his own part, all stands firm. From being loved, the wife too becomes loving; and from her being submissive, the husband becomes yielding. And see how in nature also it has been so ordered, that the one should love, the other obey. For when the party governing loves the governed, then everything stands fast. Love from the governed is not so requisite, as from the governing towards the governed; for from the other obedience is due. For that the woman has beauty, and the man desire, shows nothing else than that for the sake of love it has been made so. Do not therefore, because your wife is subject to you, act the despot; nor because your husband loves you, be thou puffed up. Let neither the husband's love elate the wife, nor the wife's subjection puff up the husband. For this cause has He subjected her to you, that she may be loved the more. For this cause He has made you to be loved, O wife, that you may easily bear your subjection. Fear not in being a subject; for subjection to one that loves you has no hardship. Fear not in loving, for you have her yielding. In no other way then could a bond have been. You have then your authority of necessity, proceeding from nature; maintain also the bond that proceeds from love, for this allows the weaker to be endurable.

Ver. 20. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in the Lord.

Again he has put that, in the Lord, at once laying down the laws of obedience, and shaming them, and casting them down. For this, says he, is well-pleasing to the Lord. See how he would have us do all not from nature only, but, prior to this, from what is pleasing to God, that we may also have reward.

Ver. 21. Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged.

Lo! Again here also is subjection and love. And he said not, Love your children, for it had been superfluous, seeing that nature itself constrains to this; but what needed correction he corrected; that the love should in this case also be the more vehement, because that the obedience is greater. For it nowhere lays down as an exemplification the relation of husband and wife; but what? Hear the prophet saying, Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pitied them that fear Him Psalm 103:13, Septuagint And again Christ says, What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? Matthew 7:9

Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged.

He has set down what he knew had the greatest power to seize upon them; and while commanding them he has spoken more like a friend; and nowhere does he mention God, for he would overcome parents, and bow their tender affections. That is, Make them not more contentious, there are occasions when you

ought even to give way.

Next he comes to the third kind of authority.

There is here also a certain love, but that no more proceeding from nature, as above, but from habit, and from the authority itself, and the works done. Seeing then that in this case the sphere of love is narrowed, while that of obedience is amplified, he dwells upon this, wishing to give to these from their obedience, what the first have from nature. So that what he discourses with the servants alone is not for their masters' sakes, but for their own also, that they may make themselves the objects of tender affection to their masters. But he sets not this forth openly; for so he would doubtless have made them supine.

Ver. 22. Servants, he says, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.

And see how always he sets down the names, wives, children, servants, being at once a just claim upon their obedience. But that none might be pained, he added, to your masters according to the flesh. Your better part, the soul, is free, he says; your service is for a season. It therefore do thou subject, that your service be no more of constraint. Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers. Make, he says, your service which is by the law, to be from the fear of Christ. For if when your master sees you not, you do your duty and what is for his honor, it is manifest that you do it because of the sleepless Eye. Not with eye-service, he says, as men-pleasers; thus implying, it is you who will have to sustain the damage. For hear the prophet saying, God has scattered the bones of the men-pleasers. Psalm 53:6, Septuagint See then how he spares them, and brings them to order. But in singleness of heart, he says, fearing God. For that is not singleness, but hypocrisy, to hold one thing, and act another; to appear one when the master is present, another when he is absent. Therefore he said not simply, in singleness of heart, but, fearing God. For this is to fear God, when, though none be seeing, we do not anything that is evil; but if we do, we fear not God, but men. Do you see how he brings them to order?

Ver. 23. Whatsoever you do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men.

He desires to have them freed not only from hypocrisy, but also from slothfulness. He has made them instead of slaves free, when they need not the superintendence of their master; for the expression heartily means this, with good will, not with a slavish necessity, but with freedom, and of choice. And what is the reward?

Ver. 24. Knowing, he says, that from the Lord you shall receive the recompense of your inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ.

For from Him also it is evident that you shall receive the reward. And that you serve the Lord is plain from this.

Ver. 25. For he that does wrong, he says, shall receive again for the wrong that he has done.

Here he confirms his former statements. For that his words may not appear to be those of flattery, he shall receive, he says, the wrong he has done, that is, he shall suffer punishment also, for there is no respect of persons. For what if you are a servant? It is no shame to you. And truly he might have said this to the masters, as he did in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Ephesians 6:9 But here he seems to me to be alluding to the Grecian masters. For, what if he is a Greek and thou a Christian? Not the persons but the actions are examined, so that even in this case you ought to serve with good will, and heartily.

Chap. iv. 1. Masters, render unto your servants that which is just and equal.

What is just? What is equal? To place them in plenty of everything, and not allow them to stand in need of others, but to recompense them for their labors. For, because I have said that they have their reward from God, do not thou therefore deprive them of it. And in another place he says, forbearing threatening Ephesians 6:9, wishing to make them more gentle; for those were perfect men; that is, with what measure you measure, it shall be measured unto you. Matthew 7:2 And the words, there is no respect of persons, are spoken with a view to these, but they are assigned to the others, in order that these may receive them. For when we have said to one person what is applicable to another, we have not corrected him so much, as the one who is in fault. You also, along with them, he says. He has here made the service common, for he says, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Ver. 2. Continue in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving.

For, since continuing in prayers frequently makes persons listless, therefore he says, watching, that is, sober, not wandering. For the devil knows, he knows, how great a good prayer is; therefore he presses heavily. And Paul also knows how careless many are when they pray, wherefore he says, continue in prayer, as of somewhat laborious, watching therein with thanksgiving. For let this, he says, be your work, to give thanks in your prayers both for the seen and the unseen, and for His benefits to the willing and unwilling, and for the kingdom, and for hell, and for tribulation, and for refreshment. For thus is the custom of the Saints to pray, and to give thanks for the common benefits of all.

I know a certain holy man who prays thus. He used to say nothing before these words, but thus, We give You thanks for all Your benefits bestowed upon us the unworthy, from the first day until the present, for what we know, and what we know not, for the seen, for the unseen, for those in deed, those in word, those with our wills, those against our wills, for all that have been bestowed upon the unworthy, even us; for tribulations, for refreshments, for hell, for punishment, for the kingdom of heaven. We beseech You to keep our soul holy, having a pure conscience; an end worthy of your lovingkindness. You that loved us so as to give Your Only-Begotten for us, grant us to become worthy of Your love; give us wisdom in Your word, and in Your fear. Only-Begotten Christ, inspire the strength that is from You. You that gave The Only-Begotten for us, and hast sent Your Holy Spirit for the remission of our sins, if in anything we have wilfully or unwillingly transgressed, pardon, and impute it not. Remember all that call upon Your Name in truth; remember all that wish us well, or the contrary, for we are all men. Then having added the Prayer of the Faithful, he there ended; having made that prayer, as a certain crowning part, and a binding together for all. For many benefits does God bestow upon us even against our wills; many also, yea more, without our knowledge even. For when we pray for one thing, and He does to us the reverse, it is plain that He does us good even when we know it not.

Ver. 3. Withal praying for us also. See his lowlymindedness; he sets himself after them.

That God may open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ. He means an entrance, and boldness in speaking. Wonderful! The great athlete said not that I may be freed from my bonds, but being in bonds he exhorted others; and exhorted them for a great object, that himself might get boldness in speaking. Both the two are great, both the quality of the person, and of the thing. Wonderful! How great is the dignity! The mystery, he says, of Christ. He shows that nothing was more dearly desired by him than this, to speak. For which I am also in bonds; that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Colossians 4:4 He means with much boldness of speech, and withholding nothing. His bonds display, not obscure

him. With much boldness he means. Tell me, are you in bonds, and do you exhort others? Yea, my bonds give me the greater boldness; but I pray for God's furtherance, for I have heard the voice of Christ saying, When they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what you shall speak. Matthew 10:19 And see, how he has expressed himself in metaphor, that God may open to us a door for the word; (see, how unassuming he is; even in his bonds, how he expresses himself;) that is, that He would soften their hearts. Still he said not so; but, that He would give us boldness; out of lowlymindedness he thus spoke, and that which he had, he asks to receive.

He shows in this Epistle, why Christ came not in those times, in that he calls the former things shadow, but the body, says he, is of Christ. So that it was necessary they should be formed to habits under the shadow. At the same time also he exhibits the greatest proof of the love he bears to them; in order that you, he says, may hear, for that reason, 'I am in bonds.' Again he sets before us those bonds of his; which I so greatly love, which rouse up my heart, and always draw me into longing to see Paul bound, and in his bonds writing, and preaching, and baptizing, and catechizing. In his bonds he was referred to on behalf of the Churches everywhere; in his bonds he built up incalculably. Then was he rather at large. For hear him saying, So that most of the brethren being confident through my bonds are more abundantly bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:14 And again he makes the same avowal of himself, saying, For when I am weak, then am I strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10 Wherefore he said also, But the word of God is not bound. 2 Timothy 2:9 He was bound with malefactors, with prisoners, with murderers; he, the teacher of the world, he that had ascended into the third heaven, that had heard the unspeakable words, was bound. 2 Corinthians 12:4 But then was his course the swifter. He that was bound, was now loosed; he that was unbound, was bound. For he indeed was doing what he would; while the other prevented him not, nor accomplished his own purpose.

What are you about, O senseless one? Do you think he is a fleshly runner? Does he strive in our race-course? His course of life is in heaven; him that runs in heaven, things on earth cannot bind nor hold. Do you see not this sun? Enclose his beams with fetters! stay him from his course! You can not. Then neither can you Paul! Yea, much less this one than that, for this enjoys more of Providence than that, seeing he bears to us light, not such as that is, but the true.

Where now are they who are unwilling to suffer anything for Christ? But why do I say suffer, seeing that they are unwilling even to give up their wealth? In time past Paul also used to bind, and cast into prison; but since he has become Christ's servant, he glories no more of doing, but of suffering. And this, moreover, is marvelous in the Preaching, when it is thus raised up and increased by the sufferers themselves, and not by the persecutors. Where has any seen such contests as this? He that suffers ill, conquers; he that does ill, is worsted. Brighter is this man than the other. Through bonds the Preaching entered. I am not ashamed Romans 1:16, yea, I glory even, he says, in preaching The Crucified. For consider, I pray: the whole world left those who were at large, and went over to those that are bound; turning away from the imprisoners, it honors those laden with chains; hating the crucifiers, it worships the Crucified.

Not the only marvel is it that the preachers were fishermen, that they were ignorant; but that there were also other hindrances, hindrances too by nature; still the increase was all the more abundant. Not only was their ignorance no hindrance; but even it itself caused the Preaching to be manifested. For hear Luke saying, And perceiving that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled. Acts 4:13 Not only were bonds no hindrance, but even of itself this made them more confident. Not so bold were the disciples when Paul was at large, as when he was bound. For he says, they are more abundantly bold to speak the

word of God without fear. Philippians 1:14 Where are they that will gainsay the divinity of the Preaching? Was not their ignorance enough to procure them to be condemned? Would it not then in this case too, affright them? For you know that by these two passions the many are possessed, vainglory and cowardice. Suppose their ignorance suffered them not to feel ashamed, still the dangers must have put them in fear.

But, says one, they wrought miracles. You do believe then that they wrought miracles. But did they not work miracles? This is a greater miracle than to work them, if men were drawn to them without miracles. Socrates too among the Greeks was put in bonds. What then? Did not his disciples straightway flee to Megara? Assuredly, why not? They admitted his arguments about immortality. But see here. Paul was put in bonds, and his disciples waxed the more confident, with reason, for they saw that the Preaching was not hindered. For, can you put the tongue in bonds? Hereby chiefly it runs. For as, unless you have bound the feet of a runner, you have not prevented him from running; so, unless you have bound the tongue of an evangelist, you have not hindered him from running. And as the former, if you have bound his loins, runs on the rather, and is supported, so too the latter preaches the rather, and with greater boldness.

A prisoner is in fear, when there is nothing beyond bonds: but one that despises death, how should he be bound? They did the same as if they had put in bonds the shadow of Paul, and had gagged its mouth. For it was a fighting with shadows; for he was both more tenderly regretted by his friends, and more revered by his enemies, as bearing the prize for courage in his bonds. And a crown binds the head; but it disgraces it not, yea rather, it makes it brilliant. Against their wills they crowned him with his chain. For, tell me, was it possible he could fear iron, who braved the adamantine gates of death? Come we, beloved, to emulate these bonds. As many of you women as deck yourselves with trinkets of gold, long ye for the bonds of Paul. Not so glitters the collar round your necks, as the grace of these iron bonds gleamed about his soul! If any longs for those, let him hate these. For what communion has softness with courage; tricking out of the body with philosophy? Those bonds Angels reverence, these they even make a mock of; those bonds are wont to draw up from earth to heaven; these bonds draw down to earth from heaven. For in truth these are bonds, not those; those are ornament, these are bonds; these, along with the body, afflict the soul also; those, along with the body, adorn as well the soul.

Would you be convinced that those are ornament? Tell me which would more have won the notice of the spectators? thou or Paul? And why do I say, thou? The queen herself who is all bedecked with gold would not have attracted the spectators so much; but if it had chanced that both Paul in his bonds and the queen had entered the Church at the same time, all would have removed their eyes from her to him; and with good reason. For to see a man of a nature greater than human, and having nought of man, but an angel upon earth, is more admirable than to see a woman decked with finery. For such indeed one may see both in theaters, and in pageants, and at baths, and many places; but whoever sees a man with bonds upon him, and deeming himself to have the greatest of ornaments, and not giving way under his bonds, does not behold a spectacle of earth, but one worthy of the heavens. The soul that is in that way attired looks about -- who has seen? Who not seen?-- is filled with pride, is possessed with anxious thoughts, is bound with countless other passions: but he that has these bonds on him, is without pride: his soul exults, is freed from every anxious care, is joyous, has its gaze on heaven, is clad with wings. If any one were to give me the choice of seeing Paul either stooping out of heaven, and uttering his voice, or out of the prison, I would choose the prison. For they of heaven visit him when he is in the prison. The bonds of Paul were the bond of the Preaching, that chain of his was its foundation. Long we for those bonds!

And how, some one says, may this be? If we break up and dash in pieces these. No good results to us from these bonds, but even harm. These will show us as prisoners There; but the bonds of Paul will loose those bonds; she that is bound with these here, with those deathless bonds shall she also be bound There, both hands and feet; she that has been bound with Paul's, shall have them in that day as it were an ornament about her. Free both yourself from your bonds, and the poor man from his hunger. Why do you rivet fast the chains of your sins? Some one says, How? When you wear gold while another is perishing, when thou, to get you vainglory, takest so much gold, while another hast not even what to eat, have you not wedged fast your sins? Put Christ about you, and not gold; where Mammon is, there Christ is not, where Christ is, there Mammon is not. Would you not put on the King of all Himself? If one had offered you the purple, and the diadem, would you not have taken them before all the gold in the world? I give you not the regal ornaments, but I offer you to put on the King Himself. And how can one put Christ on, does any say? Hear Paul saying, As many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ. Galatians 3:27 Hear the Apostolical precept, Make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. Romans 13:14 Thus does one put on Christ, if one provide not for the flesh unto its lusts. If you have put on Christ, even the demons will fear you; but if gold, even men will laugh you to scorn: if you have put on Christ, men also will reverence you.

Would you appear fair and comely? Be content with the Creator's fashioning. Why do you overlay these bits of gold, as if about to put to rights God's creation? Would you appear comely? Clothe you in alms; clothe you in benevolence; clothe you in modesty, humbleness. These are all more precious than gold; these make even the beautiful yet more comely; these make even the ill formed to be well formed. For when any one looks upon a countenance with good will, he gives his judgment from love; but an evil woman, even though she be beautiful, none can call beautiful; for the mind being confounded pronounces not its sentence aright.

That Egyptian woman of old was adorned; Joseph too was adorned; which of them was the more beautiful? I say not when she was in the palace, and he in the prison. He was naked, but clothed in the garments of chastity; she was clothed, but more unseemly than if she had been naked; for she had not modesty. When you have excessively adorned you, O woman, then you have become more unseemly than a naked one; for you have stripped you of your fair adorning. Eve also was naked; but when she had clothed herself, then was she more unseemly, for when she was naked indeed, she was adorned with the glory of God; but when she had clothed herself with the garment of sin, then was she unseemly. And thou, when arraying yourself in the garment of studied finery, dost then appear more unseemly. For that costliness avails not to make any appear beautiful, but that it is possible even for one dressed out to be even more unseemly than if naked, tell me now; if you had ever put on the dresses of a piper or a flute-player, would it not have been unseemliness? And yet those dresses are of gold; but for this very reason it were unseemliness, because they are of gold. For the costliness suits well with people on the stage, tragedians, players, mimes, dancers, fighters with wild beasts; but to a woman that is a believer, there are given other robes from God, the Only-Begotten Son of God Himself. For, he says, as many as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ. Galatians 3:27 Tell me, if one had given you kingly apparel, and you had taken a beggar's dress, and put this on above it, would you not, besides the unseemliness, have also been punished for it? You have put on the Lord of Heaven, and of the Angels, and are you still busied about earth?

I have spoken thus, because love of ornament is of itself a great evil, even were no other gendered by it, and it were possible to hold it without peril, (for it incites to vainglory and to pride,) but now many other

evils are gendered by finery, evil suspicions, unseasonable expenses, evil speakings, occasions of rapacity. For why do you adorn yourself? Tell me. Is it that you may please your husband? Then do it at home. But here the reverse is the case. For if you would please your own husband, please not others; but if you please others, you will not be able to please your own. So that you should put away all your ornaments, when you go to the forum or proceedest to the church. Besides, please not your husband by those means which harlots use, but by those rather which wives that are free employ. For wherein, tell me, does a wife differ from a harlot? In that the one regards one thing only, namely, that by the beauty of her person she may attract to herself him whom she loves; while the other both rules the house, and shares in the children, and in all other things.

Have you a little daughter? Look to it lest she inherit the mischief, for they are wont to form their manners according to their nurture, and to imitate their mothers' behavior. Be a pattern to your daughter of modesty, deck yourself with that adorning, and see that thou despise the other; for that is in truth an ornament, the other a disfigurement. Enough has been said. Now God that made the world, and has given to us the ornament of the soul, adorn us, and clothe us with His own glory, that all shining brightly in good works, and living unto His glory, we may send up glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and always, etc.

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