

## COLOSSIANS 3:18 – 4:6

This morning we will look at a final text in Colossians. In order to better understand this text we need to see where Paul has taken us to get to this point.

In chapter 1 through chapter 2:7, Paul explains the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ. Some of the most powerful and beautiful passages of Scripture are written in chapter one, specifically verses 1:15-20. Paul prayed for their wisdom, that they would have a spiritual understanding, that they would bear fruit, and give thanks to the Father who qualified them for their inheritance.

Throughout chapter 2 Paul speaks of the *denial* of that sufficiency by those within and without the church. He highlighted legalism, mysticism and asceticism as three areas that deny Christ's power, authority, and sufficiency.

Then in chapter 3 and concluding this morning, Paul explains how Christ's sufficiency is *experienced*. In chapter three he reminded us of who the believer is in Christ – the new man, the new creation, no longer controlled by sin. And because of that indicative truth, we now have the desire, and the ability to follow the imperative commands of a godly life. And where Paul *prayed* for certain things in chapter 1, he now exhorts them to *do* those same things in chapter 3.

- In chapter 1 he prayed for their wisdom – in chapter 3 he exhorts them to teach and admonish one another with that wisdom.
- In chapter 1 he prayed for spiritual understanding – in chapter 3 he encourages them to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs as a result of that understanding.
- In chapter 1 he prayed that they would be thankful – in chapter three their thankfulness is displayed by their response and behavior.
- In chapter 1 he wanted them to be thankful for their inheritance – in chapter 3 he reminds them of the reward of their inheritance.

You see, Christianity is not just personal; it is relational. The life of the new man is a life lived among other new men and old men as well. The new man is to have an impact on those around him. That responsibility becomes Paul's theme in 3:18–4:1, where he discusses the new man's relationships to other people. Paul understood that the Christian faith is not merely a religious exercise, but is a life-transforming experience which affects every aspect of the believer's existence.

Christians are to have relationships that affect others.

Christianity therefore is not the religion of monks and hermits. Believers are not called to withdraw from society, only hang around with other Christians, and only shop with advertisers in the Christian Blue Pages, but to influence others for Christ—particularly through their relationships.

Nowhere should the relational aspect of the new man be more evident than in the home—the single most important institution in the world. Genuine Christianity consists of both doctrine and practice. It is difficult to see how Christianity can have any positive effect on those around us if it cannot even transform its own homes.

In this passage Paul provides brief, direct instructions on Christian living in the home. He discusses the three relationships in homes of his day: Husbands and wives (3:18–19), parents and children (3:20–21), and masters and servants (3:22–4:1).

We could look at Ephesians 5 for complimentary Scripture on these matters, but Paul has specifically tied these to what we just read in chapter 3 of Colossians. These are examples of the new man. What the old man might have done in these familial relationships, the new man should never do.

In 3:18 Paul begins with the wife.

To submit means “to subject **oneself**, not by compulsion, but willingly”.

In Romans 8:7, Paul uses the word to speak of being submissive to the commands of God’s law. In Romans 13:1, 5 he refers to the submission of every person to governing authority, which is established by God.

Paul’s word to wives is, be submissive to **your** husbands. They do not submit to some detached, impersonal authority. Rather, they submit to the man with whom they have an intimate, personal relationship.

This can be very difficult for some women. These difficulties remind us of the behavior of the old man. He point back to verse 5-11 where there is covetousness, and not contentment. There is often “intense fellowship” in the home between husbands and wives in this area. Women who are in the Lord, guided by Biblical instruction, will be characterized by new man conduct.

Next we move to the husband in 3:19.

In spite of the failings of the church, Christ has continually loved her with grace and forgiving mercy and has never become harsh because of the church’s many sins.

Paul addresses two commands to husbands. First, they must continue to love their wives with the love of choice—a covenant kind of love. The love that existed from the start of the marriage is to continue throughout the marriage; it must not give way to bitterness. The willing, covenant love in view here is the activity of self-sacrifice. It is a deep affection that views the wife as first a sister in Christ and the object of a promise to be kept.

Husbands also must not become harsh, or bitter with their wives. Paul tells husbands not to call their wives “sweetems,” and then act like a sour puss. They must not display harshness of temper or resentment toward their wives.

And before you children get too excited, you are on the hook as well. Look with me at 3:20.

Now Mom and Dad, this relationship category cannot be right unless the relationship between husband and wife is right. But kids, that is not an excuse for your sinful behavior. It is not your parent’s fault.

In my opinion, the term for children and is not limited to a specific age group. It refers to any child still living in the home. So when your parents bark, “My house, my rules”, there is some Biblical merit to their position.

Disobedience to parents marks the ungodly described in 2 Timothy 3:2: “*Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, **disobedient to parents**, ungrateful, unholy*”

The motive for obedience is that it is well-pleasing to the Lord. Many children and teenagers struggle with knowing God’s will for their lives. Obeying their parents is the right place to start.

Parents, 3:21

What does it mean to provoke your children?

Don't thoughtlessly aggravate them. Don't unnecessarily goad them. Don't deliberately exasperate them. Don't foolishly discourage them. But express your love to them by treating them with gentleness, kindness, consideration, and respect. Be the new man to them – be that guy to your children.

Remember though, children have a duty to honor their parents and obey them from the heart, even when the parents are aggravating.

The final relationship in an ancient home was that of masters and slaves.

Paul gives two reasons for slaves (or employees in our day) to obey their masters. First, God will repay them for their faithfulness. They can endure harsh treatment now, knowing that from God they will receive the reward of the inheritance. The earthly master or boss may not give the servant what he deserves, but God will.

The second reason for obedience is that, the one who does wrong will receive the consequences from God. The warning is that the Lord will discipline without partiality in cases of disobedience.

On the other side of the relationship, masters are to treat their slaves with the justice and fairness they expect to receive from their master in heaven. God will judge masters who mistreat their slaves, as he will slaves who fail to serve their masters. As we saw in Colossians 3:11, slaves and masters are spiritually equal in Christ. Masters must accordingly treat their Christian servants as brothers in Christ.

Our final section this morning is chapter 4:2-6.

When our Lord told the Pharisees that "*the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*" (Matt. 12:34), he gave an important spiritual principle: Speech will reflect the kind of person one is. Because the tongue can speak so easily and is difficult to control, a person's speech becomes the truest indicator of his spiritual maturity.

In 4:2–6 Paul continues the discussion of the new man in Christ that he began in 3:5. In 3:5–17 he discussed the personal characteristics of the new man. In 3:18–4:1, he discussed the home life of the new man. In this passage he broadens the scope of his discussion to include unbelievers and focuses especially on the speech and walk of the new man, because that is something the watching world will look at carefully when it evaluates Christianity. Next to the thoughts, attitudes, and motives, it is also the most difficult area for believers to control.

It is fitting that Paul begins with prayer, because prayer is the strength of the believer's fellowship with Christ. Paul did not ask for the prison doors to be opened, but that doors of ministry might be opened. It was more important to Paul that he be a faithful minister than a free man.

To continue steadfastly means "to be courageously persistent," "to hold fast and not let go".

This is not to suggest that God is reluctant to answer prayer and that we must "wear him out" by our praying. God answers our prayers. But he sometimes delays the answer to increase our

faith and to accomplish his purposes at the right time. God's delays are not always God's rejections. As we continue in prayer, our own hearts are prepared for the answer God will give. We find ourselves growing in grace even before his answer comes.

Virginia Stem Owens wrote the following about wrestling with God in earnest prayer: "Christians have always interpreted the splitting of the temple veil during the crucifixion as symbolic of their liberation from the *mediated* presence of God. Henceforth they were "free" to approach him directly—which is almost like telling someone he is "free" to stick his head in the lion's jaws. For once you start praying there is no guarantee that you won't find yourself before Pharaoh, shipwrecked on a desert island, or in a lion's den.

This is no cosmic teddy bear we are cuddling up to. As one of the children describes him in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, "he's not a *tame* lion."

Awful things happen to people who pray. Their plans and lives are frequently disrupted. They end up in strange places, places where they never imagined they would be. "

That stands in marked contrast to the shallow, self-centered prayers of our day. Much of the contemporary church has lost its reverence for God. He is too often viewed as sort of a cosmic ATM. If we punch in the PIN number, he's obligated to deliver what we want.

True prayer often involves struggling and grappling with God. It is not always pretty and easy. The cry of "Abba, Father" is not one of ease, but one of anguish and pleading.

A final element in prayer is an attitude of thanksgiving. This is the fifth time that Paul has mentioned gratitude in Colossians.

In verses 3-4 Paul turns from prayer, which is speech directed to God, to the proclamation of the gospel, which is speech directed to people.

Believers are to pray for open doors because it is God who opens them.

Paul further asked the Colossians to pray that when God opened a door for the gospel – even while he was imprisoned –, *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak*. Paul felt this "ought" as a constant burden in his life. It was a compulsion to preach the Gospel.

Paul concludes this section in verses 5-6 as he challenges the believer's testimony.

What believers **are** gives credibility to **what** they say. As we talked about in verse 1:9, wisdom involves properly evaluating circumstances and making godly decisions. Believers are to exhibit a carefully planned, consistent, righteous Christian life.

If those who say they are believers live as fools, unbelievers will see fools, mock the faith and shun the gospel. Only if believers live wisely will the watching world see the power of God at work in them.

Consistency of life must be followed by consistency of speech. Paul is not speaking here of preaching the gospel, but general conversation. Believers' speech must always be with grace, as was Christ's. There is no place for those things that characterize the unredeemed mouth.

To speak with grace means to say what is spiritual, wholesome, fitting, kind, sensitive, purposeful, complementary, gentle, truthful, loving, and thoughtful.

The speech of the new man is not only to be gracious, but also to have an effect. Believer's speech should act as a purifying influence, rescuing conversation from the filth that so often surrounds it.

Throughout our time in Colossians, we have seen that Paul's purpose was to weave a tightly knit argument regarding the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, we are given some of the most beautiful expressions about Christ that exist in scripture.

- It is in Colossians that we are told that Christ is above all creation, whether material or spiritual.
- It is in Colossians that we are told that all things were created by him and for him.
- It is in Colossians that we are told that in Christ, all things are held together.
- It is in Colossians that the Gentiles are told that their hope of glory is "Christ in you."
- And it is in Colossians that we are reminded of who we are in Christ, the new man, and our union with him.

And because of that indicative truth of who we are, the imperatives of our walk become possible. We have seen the walk in each chapter of this letter:

- "Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (1:10). How? Because he has filled you with knowledge and wisdom.
- "Walk in him" (2:6). Why? Because God has rooted you in Christ and is building you up in him.
- "No longer walk as the old man, but walk as the new man. Chapter 3. Why? Because you have put to death sin in your lives.
- "Walk in wisdom (4:5). Why? Because you represent Christ to the lost.

This story has been told about Dr. Will H. Houghton, who pastored the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City and later served as president of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute till his death in 1946. When Dr. Houghton became pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle in Atlanta, a man in that city hired a private detective to follow Dr. Houghton and report on his conduct. After a few weeks, the detective was able to report to the man that Dr. Houghton's life matched his preaching.

How would your walk measure up to the truth of who you are in Christ?

- Do you really comprehend your new position and new life in Christ?
- Are you walking in a manner worthy of Christ?
- Do you really understand and embrace the preeminent and sufficient Christ, or have you developed your own religion?
- And are you committed to walking in the wisdom and full assurance of understanding in Christ?