

11/11/2021 – Colossians, The Faithful Disciple

Unit IV: Lesson 2, A Faithful Disciple and His Life with Others

Reading: Colossians 3:18-4:18

SUMMARY

In the closing section of his letter, Paul makes specific and highly practical applications of the new life in Christ. In three representative pairs (husband-wife, parents-children, masters-slaves) Paul shows the reciprocal duties that the Gospel lays on those who live by it. **THE KEY PHRASE THAT TRANSFORMS ALL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IS, "IN THE LORD." EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED IN CHRIST!**

Paul reminds wives to be subject to their husbands because they are first subject to Christ. This does not imply "inferiority" but is the way oneness works in the Lord's plan. Husbands are to love their wives (unbelievable in Paul's world!) rather than regarding them as things for personal satisfaction or simply the custodian of children. Children are to obey their parents – as part of their obedience to Christ. Fathers are not to be tyrants (which they often were in Paul's day) nor to discourage their children through harsh discipline. Paul reminds the master that he has a master – Christ. To the slave Paul asserts that his faithfulness in his duties is really faithfulness rendered to Christ. God will be no more partial to the master in the judgment than to the slave.

To all the Colossians Paul issues some sound words of wisdom. Their prayers are the most certain bulwark against the temptation to listen to heretical teaching. They also need to temper enthusiasm in their witness with **DISCRETION**. "Outsiders" are to be won at every opportunity, but with graciousness and good humor, not ill-timed hostility.

Paul closes by mentioning a number of fellow workers and acquaintances. By mentioning three Jews and three Gentiles he demonstrates once again **HOW COMPLETELY CHRIST HAS BROKEN DOWN ALL DIVISIONS AND MAN-MADE BARRIERS THROUGH THE GOSPEL**. He closes with his own greeting by using **THE WORD MOST CHARACTERISTIC OF PAUL AND HIS GOSPEL – GRACE**. **IT WAS GRACE THAT MADE HIM AN APOSTLE – EVEN AN APOSTLE IN CHAINS. IT WAS GRACE THAT CALLED THE COLOSSIANS TO BE FAITHFUL DISCIPLES. THE CONTENT OF THAT GRACE IS THE WORK OF THE CHRIST WHO CALLED THEM BOTH!**

A CLOSER LOOK

Verses 3:18-4:1

The brevity of this section on household duties has often been noted. **THE REALLY NEW THING IN THIS SECTION IS THE RECIPROCAL NATURE OF THE DUTIES AND THE FACT THAT THEY ARE RENDERED IN THE LORD**. Wives, children, and slaves were often viewed as no more than property by the husband or owner. **HERE CHRIST TRANSFORMS THESE RELATIONSHIPS**.

Verse 18:

"wives be subject" – Our natural minds hear this language as inferiority. **THAT IS NOT THE TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.** This and the following verses are the working out of how the new life of oneness in Christ works in a world full of domination and sin. Oneness comes from God the Source through Christ to the husband to the wife. Compare Ephesians 5:21 where husband and wife are urged to be "subject to one another."

"fitting in the Lord" – **HERE IS THE DETERMINING FACTOR. IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST THERE ARE NO DIVISIONS, NO SUPERIOR/INFERIOR, NO DOMINATIONS, BUT PEACE AND ONENESS.**

Verse 19:

"love . . . do not be harsh" – This is the mutual obligation of the husband, **A COMPLETE DEPARTURE FROM PAGAN IDEAS AND MORALITY.** In pagan culture, women were often viewed as being there for the husband's pleasure and to rear the children. **CHRIST TRANSFORMS RELATIONSHIPS!**

Verse 20:

"children obey your parents" – Again the injunction is to do this because it "pleases the Lord."

Verse 21:

"fathers, do not provoke . . ." – Once again the reciprocal nature of the relationship is evident. "Chafe" would be a better translation than "provoke." The idea is that continual, irksome discipline that is harsh causes children to feel that nothing they do is right.

Verses 22 – 4:1

This whole section on slaves and masters is remarkable. The key to understanding it is the play on the word "masters" – literally in Greek, "lords." **SLAVES WILL OBEY THEIR EARTHLY "LORDS" BECAUSE THEY HAVE A FAR BETTER AND GREATER LORD – JESUS CHRIST!** They will work well not only when their master is watching (v. 22), but because **IN EVERYTHING THEY SEEK TO PLEASE JESUS CHRIST** (v. 23). Like all other Christians, they live in a new dimension that is eternal (v. 24) and their minds, too, are "set on things eternal."

God is not a God of partiality; i.e., God does not favor the master more than the slave, nor the slave more than the master. **IN THE NEW DIMENSION IN CHRIST ALL DISTINCTIONS ARE DONE AWAY WITH.** Severe masters will receive the appropriate "reward" on the last day! Unruly slaves will experience the same "reward"! The "master" needs to remember there is a greater Master – Jesus Christ. **HE IS THE TRUE LORD OF BOTH MASTER AND SLAVE!**

Verses 2-6:

One might label this section as "prayer and wisdom." Verses 2-4 deal with prayer. The key phrase is "continue steadfastly" (v. 2). The Greek verb is a picture of continual siege drawn from battle. **THE IDEA IS THAT OUR PRAYERS REFLECT UNREMITTING PERSEVERENCE** (Cf. Gen. 32:26). When prayer is described by Paul as watchful, he means **THAT PRAYER IS**

OUR GREATEST WEAPON AGAINST TEMPTATION (compare Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane). Paul, therefore, seeks the fervent prayer of the Colossians for his mission, for prayer is also intercessory for others.

Verses 5 and 6 ought to be read and studied more. They deal with the Christian's wisdom in dealing with the children of this world. ENTHUSIASM NEEDS TO BE TEMPERED WITH DISCRETION. That is the meaning of Paul's injunctions here. "Outsiders" suggests a marvelously different view of things. GENERALLY, PAGANS SEE CHRISTIANS AS "OUTSIDERS." HERE THE OPPOSITE VIEW IS TAKEN. THE PAGAN IS THE OUTSIDER! "Making the most of the time" means taking advantage of each occasion to speak of Christ and the new life. But Christian witness needs to be gracious (rather than ill-timed hostility) and "seasoned with salt" (full of good humor). TOO MANY CHRISTIANS IN THEIR WITNESS ARE CENSORIOUS AND DULL!

Verses 7-18:

Perhaps the easiest way to deal with this section is to identify those mentioned.

"Tychicus" – A gentile convert who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem on his final visit (Acts 20:4). He was traveling from Rome to the Lycus Valley with Onesimus and would be bearing the letter to the Colossians. He had assisted Paul in evangelizing Macedonia and Achaia. Paul bestows great praise and affection on him with three phrases - "beloved brother," "faithful minister," "fellow servant" (literally, "slave").

"Onesimus" – He was a runaway slave who came to Rome and was probably converted by St. Paul. He was a Colossian himself, though not a member of the Colossian congregation. Read the book of Philemon to see how Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon, his master. Paul pays this slave a great compliment by calling him a "faithful and beloved brother." IN REGARD TO SLAVERY, PAUL PRACTICED WHAT HE PREACHED!

Verses 10-14 contain the names of six Christian men – three Jews and three Gentiles. Once again we see the Gospel at work, since all six are in Paul's company as he is writing to the Colossians.

"Aristarchus" – A Jew from Thessalonica who was with Paul during the rioting at Ephesus (Acts 19:29). He later went to Jerusalem with Paul (Acts 20:4), and then on to Rome with him (Acts 27:2). Described as Paul's "fellow prisoner," he had probably volunteered to assist Paul during his imprisonment.

"Mark, the cousin of Barnabas" – A young Jew who had originally accompanied Paul and Barnabas some 12 years earlier but had deserted them at Perga. Apparently, the relationship between him and Paul had been restored.

"Jesus, called Justus" – Jesus is a common Jewish name. We know nothing more about him.

In verse 11 there is a sorry note. Paul had little real success with Christianized Jews. He obviously felt deeply his alienation from his own people (Rom. 9:3). He received little sympathetic support except from the three he mentions.

"Epaphras" – The Gentile who had evangelized Colossae. Of interest here is the word for "remember earnestly" about Epaphras' prayers for the Colossians. The Greek word means strenuous labor or work. PRAYER IS "HARD WORK" IN BEHALF OF OTHERS.

"Luke" – Paul's companion on many of his travels. A physician by profession, he was probably with Paul as his own personal physician. Paul's affection for him is here obvious.

"Demas" – He is only mentioned here. Nothing more is said. Later, we are told that he deserted the faith (II Tim. 4:10). He is probably the classic example of one who "lost the faith."

"Nympha" – A female Christian in whose home the congregation (or part of it) of Laodicea met.

"letter from Laodicea" – We know nothing of this letter. It has been lost to us.

"Archippus" – This message to Archippus means little to us. It is possible that he had taken over the pastorate in Colossae since Epaphras joined Paul in Rome. The statement would then make sense.

Verse 18:

Paul often closed his letters with printing in his own hand, since forgeries in his name sometimes circulated (II Thess. 2:2, 3:17). He often dictated his letters and then signed them with his own personal closing.

"remember my fetters" – With a poignant farewell, Paul reminds the Colossians of his imprisonment on their behalf and that of all Christians. HE LEAVES THEM WITH GOD'S GRACE – THAT HAS CALLED THEM TO BE FAITHFUL DISCIPLES AND HIM TO BE AN APOSTLE – EVEN AN APOSTLE IN CHAINS!

Questions for Discussion

1. To what do you attribute the fact that the New Testament writers do not try to overthrow slavery, the Roman Empire, etc.? What does this tell us about the meaning of faithfulness within "the orders of this world"?
2. How does the Gospel alter basic relationships? What is the higher concern that Paul voices in this section? Do you agree?
3. What do we learn from 4:2-6 about our Christian witness and standing fast against the allurements of new teachings contrary to the Gospel?
4. While 4:7-18 may appear to be an endless list of names, what can we learn from this section about the relationships the Gospel builds? What does this say about the "lonely crowd" mentality that infests our times?
5. What does "grace" have to do with this entire letter? It is the one word most characteristic of Paul's theology.