

**Held Together:
Principles for Keeping the Family Together
Colossians 3:18-4:6**

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Text Introduction: We have considered the content of Colossians this fall. A key phrase of Colossians comes in Colossians 1:17, "And by Him all things hold together." I love this phrase. This phrase speaks to the preeminence of Jesus. He is all things. If He is all things, He must be first place in my life.

We have come to our final message in this survey of the book. I want to remind you again of the relationship between the theology and application of this book and really all books of the Bible. Our practice comes from our theology.

Let's focus on Colossians 3:18-4:6.

Text: Wives, be submissive to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them.

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so they won't become discouraged.

²² Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, in order to please men, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.

²³ Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism.

4 Masters, supply your slaves with what is right and fair, since you know that you too have a Master in heaven.

² Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the Messiah, for which I am in prison, ⁴ so that I may reveal it as I am required to speak. ⁵ Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶ Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

Introduction: Twenty years ago I was had finished my course work and had sat for my Oral Exam for my Ph.D. I was writing my dissertation. I was asked to teach a class in the Master's program for a professor on Sabbatical. The course that I was teaching was an interpretation class on Ephesians and Colossians. The similarity of the two books made this possible. When I got my course roster, I noticed the name of a tenured professor's wife. As a young, inexperienced, barely out of seminary preacher, this made me nervous. I just didn't know how nervous I would become. On the first day of class, I asked each of my students to identify themselves and tell me and the rest of the class why they were taking this class. Most of the students were honest. "I need this class in order to fulfill a New Testament elective for graduation." A few students were more honest than I would have liked. "I'm taking this class because you are not a real professor and I figured it would be easier."

When the professor's wife's turn came, I almost fainted. She said, "I am not a student. My husband is a professor. I am just auditing this class for my own learning. I have heard all of my adult life about these passages in Ephesians and Colossians about 'wives submitting to husbands' and I'm here to find out what that means."

Well, let's dive in.

We have been studying this book for some weeks. We have several guests here today because of the Dedication service and Thanksgiving week, so let me just set this passage up for all of us. It is a good review for understanding this passage and will be helpful to all of us.

Remember the Purpose of Colossians—The purpose can be succinctly stated in 1:18, "so that He might come to have first place in everything." (1:18)

Paul seems to move from the general to the most specific. I think it is worth noting that the specific area that he addressed is in the matter of our relationships. If we read all the way through 4:6, we will notice that this is a far-reaching list of our relationships.

The reason for this move from general to specific is obvious, I trust. There is not one area of your life that God doesn't say, "That is mine." That area of life is to be brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Your family belongs to me. Your career belongs to me. Your relationships with the "outside" world belong to me. I have come to have first place in everything.

Reflect on the Preceding Passage—There are some things we must put to death and put away; there are other things we must put on. (3:5-17) Remember the list in verses 5-7. Then, there is a second list in verses 8-10. Finally, there is a list of what should be in our lives in verses 12-14. We accomplish these things by definite actions describe in verses 15-17.

Recognize the People of this Passage

There are several groups of people that should be identified in this passage. There are four. Paul started at our most intimate relationships and moves outward.

- Wives/Husbands
- Children/Parents
- Slaves/Masters
- Christians/non-Christians

Respect the Principles of this Passage

- Wives/Husbands—submit, love—Now, the starting place is to see how Paul elevated the role of women. In Jewish culture, women had no rights at all. Women were little more than possessions instead or people. In the Greek world, women were kept secluded. Real companionship was not normal. In the Roman world, divorce was rampant. The first-century writer, Seneca, described marriage in the Roman empire with the words, "women leave home to marry and marry to divorce." The view of marriage here is "off the charts" higher. The Ephesians parallel passage spends more time on this issue, so is relevant here. There are several layers of submission identified in the Ephesians passage. There is the submission to God that is implied in that

passage and here. There is a mutual submission that all people ought to have toward one another. (That's how our world works.) Then there is a matrimonial submission that only works when there is a Christ-like love superseding the idea of submission. Again, Paul is more thorough in the Ephesians 5 passage when he indicated that husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church. Men, it's the hardest thing you will ever do in life, because Jesus loved the church with a perfect and sacrificing love.

- Children/Parents—Obey, do not exasperate (encourage, do not discourage)—These two principles are self-explanatory. The problem is not what do these principles mean; the problem is walking in obedience to these commands.
- Slaves/Masters—Work as unto the Lord, do what is right—This means just what it says.
- Christians/non-Christians—walk in wisdom—There is much we can learn here. This means watch what we say at all times for our words are our witness.

So What?

Relationships that deserve our full attention always require putting on the things of Christ. Why?

- Relationships present the temptation to settle.
- Relationships present the temptation to be selfish.
- Relationships present the temptation to exercise supremacy.

All of which are opposite to the Gospel!

Relationships reflect most clearly the maturity of our relationships to Christ.

Our maturity in Christ is not most clearly defined in how much we know about the Bible. It does not matter how many times you have read through the Bible, how much Scripture you can quote, how many classes you have taken, whether you know Greek or Hebrew, teach Sunday School, or even share your faith. Our maturity in Christ is not most clearly defined by how often we pray or how eloquent our words when we pray. Come up with any measurement of maturity that you wish, but the Scripture is going to come back to the strength of our relationships. The greatest measure of how we are doing vertically (our relationship to God) is how are we doing horizontally (with others).

And, oh yeah, one other thing, not just some relationships—but the starting place is your relationship to your spouse, then children, or parents, then those with whom you work, and even then those you don't even really know—the outsiders. We include those that might not be anything like you. We are not talking about being best friends with the whole planet, but treating everyone mutually well for the purposes of the Gospel.

Now What?

- Determine that your relationships to others matter to God.
- Depend on God to help you in every relationship.

Remember Psalm 127, “Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain.” So, if we believe this, then we acknowledge the next item.

- Devote yourself to God in prayer.

And possibly

- Dedicate yourself to God.

It may be that you need to dedicate yourself to God. So, we asked these families at the beginning to dedicate themselves to the Lord. How about each of us dedicating or re-dedicating ourselves to the Lord?