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Hold Fast to Christ!

(Col 2:2b-3 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“Don’t Misuse Your Liberty”

April 21, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 3:18-4:1

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:15-6:9

Introduction-

“In 1521 Luther dealt largely with prophecy, in which he broadened the foundations of the Reformation

placing them on prophetic faith. His main interest was centered on the prophecy of the Little Horn in Daniel 8:9-12, 23-25. The antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2 was identified as the power of the Papacy. So too was the Little Horn of Daniel 7, coming up among the divisions of Rome, explicitly applied.

Luther made his pronouncements from Wartburg in the context of rapid developments at Wittenberg, of which he was kept fully informed. Andreas Karlstadt, supported by the ex-Augustinian Gabriel Zwingli, embarked on a radical programme of reform there in June 1521, exceeding anything envisaged by Luther. The reforms provoked disturbances, including a revolt by the Augustinian monks against their prior, the smashing of statues and images in churches, and denunciations of the magistracy.

After secretly visiting Wittenberg in early December 1521, Luther wrote A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther

to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion.

Wittenberg became even more volatile after Christmas when a band of visionary zealots, the so-called Zwickau prophets, arrived, preaching revolutionary doctrines such as the equality of man, adult baptism, and Christ's imminent return. When the town council asked Luther to return, he decided it was his duty to act.

Luther secretly returned to Wittenberg on 6 March 1522. "During my absence," he wrote to the Elector, "Satan has entered my sheepfold, and committed ravages which I cannot repair by writing, but only by my personal presence and living word." For eight days in Lent, beginning on Invocavit Sunday, 9 March, Luther preached eight sermons, which became known as the "Invocavit Sermons." In these sermons, he hammered home the primacy of core Christian values such as love, patience, charity, and freedom, and reminded the citizens to trust God's word rather than violence to bring about necessary change.

"Do you know what the Devil thinks when he sees men use violence to propagate the gospel? He sits with folded arms behind the fire of hell, and says with malignant looks and frightful grin: 'Ah, how wise these madmen are to play my game! Let them go on; I

shall reap the benefit. I delight in it.' But when he sees the Word running and contending alone on the battlefield, then he shudders and shakes for fear."

The effect of Luther's intervention was immediate. After the sixth sermon, the Wittenberg jurist Jerome Schurf wrote to the elector: "Oh, what joy has Dr. Martin's return spread among us! His words, through divine mercy, are bringing back every day misguided people into the way of the truth."

And so it has been down through the history of the church. Extremism has broken out on occasion – more than just occasionally – and we still must take care to watch for it in our own lives.

Paul has been driving home to us the truth of our liberty in Christ. We are not to be judged, we must not permit anyone to pronounce us "disqualified," nor are we to fall for the trap of man's traditions and philosophies that claim we need more than Christ. We are His and He is ours and since He is everything and possesses everything and has accomplished everything necessary for our redemption, we stand complete in Him.

But with liberty comes a danger. Paul mentioned it more than once-

1 Corinthians 8:9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

So the gospel is not a promoter of anti-nomian lawlessness. It means that we are even more careful to love others and deny ourselves as necessary. This is far different than placing ourselves under the bondage of man. One is motivated by slavery, the other by love.

Having instructed us then generally in chapter 3 about putting off the old self and its practices and embracing who we now are in Christ (do not lie to one another, remember?), Paul addresses a very specific aspect of our lives – our households. Husbands, wives, children, parents, masters and slaves (as households commonly had slaves living in them and many early Christians were slaves themselves).

I propose that it is vital for us to understand, as we attempt to interpret and apply the New Testament instruction about marriage particularly, that Christ and His gospel are not fundamentally about a revolution in

this world's social order, but rather the creation of an entire new man in a new world that is a kingdom "not of this world."

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

So when a slave becomes a Christian, he or she was not called to lead a slave revolt. He was not called to put on a haughty attitude toward his master. And if he did, then what kind of message would that send through society about the nature of the gospel? It would serve as a hindrance for sure.

Similarly, in regard to marriage and the family. Husbands were not to lord it over their wives, but quite the opposite. Wives were not to start up some "new Roman wives" society and become liberated women who rejected all social norms regarding wives. Children must respect their parents and parents were to love their children. Households in other words were to be so governed by the love of Christ that they would be the best marriages and best families and, if you have to be a slave, the best houses to be a slave in.

And so we have the instruction:

Colossians 3:18-4:1 (18) **Wives**, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (19) **Husbands**, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

(20) **Children**, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. (21) **Fathers**, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

(22) **Slaves**, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. (23) Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, (24) knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (25) For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. 4:1 **Masters**, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

This is the same instruction Paul gives to the Ephesian church (Eph 5:15ff), but in a much more condensed version.

Let's notice first of all some important, general observations about this passage:

1. In each of these 3 relationships, marriage, parent-child, master-slave, both parties are given instruction.

- Submit/love
- Obey/Don't provoke
- Obey/be just and fair

Therefore, both parties must fulfill their instructions if the relationship is going to be what the Lord desires it to be.

2. In each of these 3 relationships, the party who is to be submitted to or obeyed, the party with authority in other words, is also given a negative instruction that cautions against misuse of that authority:

- Husbands: do not be harsh
- Fathers: do not provoke
- Masters: (we go back to Ephesians for this one), stop threatening, Eph 6:9

And so it can be said that the authoritative party in these relationships bears the greater duty.

2. The instruction is not given in an absolute, all-encompassing manner. Notice-

- As is fitting in the Lord It is not fitting in the Lord's sight for anyone to do everything they are told no matter what it is.

- Children...in everything...for this pleases the Lord. Once again, this presumes that the instruction given by parents will be in accord with Christ.
- Slaves, obey in everything...fearing the Lord...as for the Lord. It is inconceivable then that a slave would be acting in the fear of the Lord and obeying as for the Lord if what he was doing was an abomination to the Lord.

3. We are not meant to assume that each of these 3 relationships are absolutely parallel in nature.

- A child is not a slave
- A parent is not a master of a slave.
- A wife is not a slave or a child
- A husband is not a slave master or a parent to his wife.

I think that of all these points, perhaps the one which is most commonly violated is the point that a wife is not one of the children. We will speak more to this later.

4. These instructions are a concrete example of Paul's instructions given in 3:12ff –

Colossians 3:12-17 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, (13) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (14) **And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.** (15) And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. (16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (17) And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Verse 14 really says it all. Our lives and our homes are to be characterized by the acting out of, from our hearts, the love of Christ and when that happens our marriages and homes will be “bound together in perfect harmony.”

5. Some of the instructions given to one relationship can also transfer to the others. For example:

- All of us (as seen in 4:1) have a Master in heaven to whom we shall give account – *knowing (remembering) that you also have a Master in heaven.*
- Our duties are to be done with sincerity of heart to please the Lord, not in a mere external manner for the purpose of pleasing people. This is vital. We serve Christ out of love for Him –

Colossians 3:22-24 Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, **not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart,** fearing the Lord. (23) Whatever you do, **work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,** (24) knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

I suppose that one of the greatest dangers for every Christian, and perhaps especially for children and young people, is to get caught up in the trap of being a people-pleaser Christian. The word Paul uses here is **ὀφθαλμοδουλία** which is a combo of an “eye” word: ophthalmo + service, doulia. So it is something that is pleasing to the eye. Well, if all a

person is out to do is to look good in the eyes of others, the things he or she will do in the name of Christ will be mere outward, visible acts. There are many people, including young people, who look very, very Christian, but they aren’t.

There is nothing more damaging to the gospel than for people who profess to be Christians to consist of a hollow shell. They look like an M&M and you expect chocolate on the inside, but they are hollow. So let’s not serve the Lord for appearances only. Just to make our parents happy or an employer happy, but to please the Lord. *As for the Lord, and not for men.*

NOTE: Verse 25 is a bit confusing. Is Paul cautioning US about doing wrong, or is he encouraging us that wrongdoers will be justly dealt with by the Lord?

The Tension Between Equality in Christ and Hierarchical Relationships

It is one thing to understand that children are to obey their parents, and employees (slaves here in the text) their employers. But in particular we get into confusion when we read in Scripture that wives are to submit to their husbands. Wrong understanding

and application of this principle which appears in numbers of places in God's Word have caused all kinds of serious trouble and turmoil in the church, in homes, and in society. How are these instructions to be reconciled with other New Testament teaching such as:

Galatians 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Was Paul merely capitulating to “the prevailing cultural norm, a reinforcement of a patriarchal status quo that cannot be reconciled with the more fundamental ‘liberating’ New Testament message?” (Douglas Moo) We cannot accept this (Moo also rejects it) and still hold to the inerrancy of Holy Scripture. God's Word cannot contradict itself.

Notice that the principle of liberation for all stated in Gal 3:28 is ALSO stated in Colossians 3:11 –

Colossians 3:11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

And then just a few verses later, Paul gives the instruction for Christian households.

Moo also observes:

“Other interpreters, including many evangelicals, give full weight to these passages but argue that the exhortations to submission are deliberate accommodations to the prevailing culture. People in the Greco-Roman world were suspicious of new religious movements, particularly ones that proclaimed revolutionary ideas such as the equality of all people. Paul and other NT writers [therefore] urge Christians to respect the hierarchical structure of the Greco-Roman household as a means of defending the new faith from charges that it was intent on overthrowing existing social structures. This concern to allay suspicion about the gospel was indeed one motivation for some of these NT passages, such as:

Titus 2:9-10 Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, (10) not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

1 Peter 3:1-2 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, (2) when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

And we have already suggested that this purpose comes into play. We do need to be concerned that we do not cause unnecessary stumbling blocks to the gospel by giving ammunition to critics. [Of course in our day, the teaching of these passages, especially about wives and husbands, is in itself the stumbling block to our culture!]

Listen however as Moo explains why we cannot just deal with these passages that call for wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives by simply writing them off as accommodations to an ancient culture that is long past.

“For one thing, all the passages are suffused with appeals to distinctly Christian principles. For another, it is perhaps unlikely that the NT authors would be so concerned to comment the church that they would teach less than a genuine NT ethic. Moreover, we should, perhaps, exercise a ‘hermeneutic’ of suspicion on our own interpretive tendencies: it would be all too easy to impose on the NT our own modern preoccupation with and certain

definition of ‘liberation’ that does not reflect the balance of the NT teaching on these issues. We suggest then, that the instructions within the household code, while obviously directed toward and thereby reflecting the culture of that time (e.g. by addressing slavery), are not simply reflections of *that* culture. They must be ‘heard’ as an authentic NT voice, integrated with, and not simply overridden by, the very important insistence on ‘equality’ in Christ.”

Moo goes on to agree with the point we made about not misusing Christian liberty and the truths of Colossians 1-2. Yes, we are all one in Christ, we are all heirs and we are all new creations, but these truths are never intended by Scripture to obliterate ALL distinction between men and women, husbands and wives, children and parents. He explains how some early Christians did in fact take it this way, rejecting marriage and sex. After all, if we are to set our minds on things above in the heavenlies and not on earthly things, then doesn’t this kind of thing follow? Paul’s answer is – no! The household order is not to be rejected. And in fact these household codes such as Col 3:18ff may well be Scripture’s response to those very kinds of excesses and abuses. Moo writes:

“...certain household institutions continued to exist in the new age and

that believers need to relate appropriately to one another within these institutions. The new family of God gave believers their fundamental identity, but the spiritual family did not eliminate the continuing significance of the physical family and the relations appropriate to its smooth functioning.”

Now that all seems well and good, but difficulties still persist. For instance, how do we say that Paul’s instruction here for husbands and wives, parents and children, apply but then we come to the section on masters and slaves. I have paralleled this into today’s era by speaking of employers and employees, but is that a correct application? Do these household codes support slavery? If we so, no –then on what basis do we say “yes” to husband/wife and father/child instruction?

This can possibly be explained in this manner: Paul is not teaching specifically the establishment of institutions, but is addressing already existing ones. Scripture elsewhere establishes marriage and families. And while it does not actively call for abolition of slavery, it does certainly seem that slavery is incompatible with the gospel. So Paul may well simply be dealing with a plain fact of his day: marriages existed, parents and children existed, and slavery existed. How

were Christians in these relationships to function?

“Whether those roles should continue or are endorsed by the author or by God is simply not in view here. Other biblical texts make clear enough that marriage and family are to endure as long as this world lasts. There is nothing even approaching any such endorsement of slavery, however.”
(Moo)

Let’s make just two more points here that are of significance as well:

1. We may well not fully grasp just how “counter-cultural” and liberating these instructions really are compared to the common practice in Paul’s day. Christ is to govern all. Are there more rights given to the subordinate persons in these relationships than we realize?

2. The specific cultural setting of the church to which these household codes were addressed does come into play. That is to say, while we don’t accept the idea that Paul is merely making accommodation to the long-past culture of his day (thus there is not real application of what he says here for us today), we do realize that he did tailor his words to the specific setting of the recipients of his epistles. So, for instance, we see that Paul spends much more time here in Colossians addressing masters and slaves than he

does husbands and wives. In his parallel instruction to the Ephesians, his heaviest emphasis is upon husband and wives. So to deny that there is any level of what we could call “accommodation” would be wrong. Did Colossae have more slaves? Was there a particular problem there, more than in Ephesus?

This much is certainly plain however: that the Lordship of Christ extends to every area of our present lives. Every area. So that whatever we do, we must strive to do it to the glory of Christ.

And so the question at hand here, as always is, *in what ways can we live so as to bring glory to Christ by bringing every aspect of our lives under His rule?*

The Equality of Men and Women in Christ

I want to spend some time, including into next week, examining what is, for numbers of reasons, the most difficult and controversial relationship addressed by Paul here: husbands and wives. Specifically the instruction to the wife that she is to submit to her husband. No one really objects to the command that husbands are to love their wives (and for that reason it is most often not given the attention that it really requires), but this matter of

submission of one human being to another is a hot one, especially when the specific relationship is that of a wife to her husband. We need to be very clear as to what Paul is telling us AND we must be just as clear regarding what he is NOT teaching.

I was going to say that we must begin by rejecting patriarchy, but that word has been given so many different nuances that sometimes it claims that what the New Testament is teaching here is patriarchy. Here is Wikipedia-

Patriarchy (*rule by fathers*) is a social system in which the male is the primary authority figure [central](#) to social organization and the central roles of political leadership, moral authority, and control of property, and where fathers hold authority over women and children. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails [female subordination](#). Many patriarchal societies are also [patrilineal](#), meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. The female equivalent is [matriarchy](#).

Historically, patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, and economic organization of a range of different cultures. Patriarchy also has a strong influence on modern civilization, although many cultures have moved towards a more egalitarian social system over the past century

You can see that a few points in this description are not necessarily contrary to Scripture – such as “fathers hold authority over women and children.” (My conceding to just that point will already raise the ire of many people, as will any use of words like “subordinate.” Sometimes some of that ire is justified). But there is much in this definition that we would not consider to be biblical. If you watch the series *Downtown Abbey*, set in England in 1915, you will see an example of patriarchy. A wife could not inherit the estate when her husband died. It had to pass down to a male heir, even if that heir was a cousin.

So let me try to keep things more simple and accurate. What we are going to reject is that men are superior to women simply by virtue of them having a Y chromosome instead of another X. When I use the word “patriarchy” that is what I mean. Men are better, smarter, more entitled than women – that kind of thinking.

In contrast, Scripture (as we have already seen this morning) is quite plain that all Christians are heirs in Christ. Hear it again-

Galatians 3:25-29 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, (26) for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (27) For as

many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Beginning next week I want to take you through the New Testament and show you how much emphasis the gospel places on this fact. I think we will all be rather surprised at just how large of a role women played in the ministries of Jesus and the Apostles. And I think that is very important for us to be reminded of.

For now, let's just bring things to a close by thinking through some of the implications of Gal 3:28-29.

Whenever and wherever human beings are *different*, you will find racism in this world. Discrimination. Hatred. Fear. And it is very much rooted in a quest for power. Power over those who are different from us and therefore who are deemed a threat to us. The age-old battle over power and control. It infects most every aspect of our lives on a personal, community, and national level.

- Black vs white
- Rich vs poor

- Differing political philosophies
- Nationalities
- North vs South
- And yes, hetero vs homosexual. (I include this point to challenge each of us to self-examination. Is our opposition to sexual sin motivated by a desire for God's truth and to serve Christ, or is it rather propelled by a kind of racist, prejudicial fear/hatred of the homosexual? Remember that much racism has functioned under the guise of Christianity.
- And, of course to our subject, male vs female.

There is indeed an evil called misogyny. And, we should include misandry, the hatred of men.

NOTE: I went to the Wikipedia page to be sure that I was spelling misogyny correctly and I found this special announcement there that tells you just how hot this subject is in the way of controversy-

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Patriarchy, I suggest, is the product of misogyny. But there is another more remote source of the problem:

Genesis 3:16-19 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. **Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.**" (17) And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; (18) thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. (19) By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

It has been pointed out that this section is a description of elements of the curse. A post-fall scenario in other words. Pain in childbearing. Cursed ground bringing thorns and thistles.

And what appears to be the beginning of the male-female power struggle. This is not how it was in the beginning before sin. It is not presented here as a good thing. But it certainly largely describes the experience of history when it comes to men and women, right?

In some way then, the New Testament instruction to husbands and wives –

Colossians 3:18-19 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (19) Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

...is a radical reversal of this part of the curse. That is to say, what Paul says here *is a good thing*. What we need to do is try to be as clear on what it means as we can. And to that end we will proceed next time.

For now, husbands and wives in particular – your profession of Christ requires that you turn the curse around in your home and that this battle of the sexes between husband and wife come to an end. Husbands, if we have been harsh with our wives, then God's word to us is, *stop it!* Love your wife. Set things right and repent of the harshness. Wives, do not battle your husband in some kind of power quest. As he loves you as he is command, let him do so. You have been bought by

Christ, redeemed from the curse. Our marriages and families must show it. We must be who we are.