

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabile.org.

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Title: It is the Lord Christ Whom You Serve

Text: Colossians 3:18-4:1

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in the Storyline of the Bible. She is determined by design to have a God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching focused on personal discipleship through intentional and systematic instruction; a Global-impacting mission that resolves to be a church planting church; and a Grace-based fellowship where disciples are invited to live under a reigning grace characterized by a Gospel-driven sanctification that celebrates a divine monergism to the Christian life.

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IT IS THE LORD CHRIST WHOM YOU SERVE

(COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1)

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, **as for the Lord rather than for men,** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. **It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.** (Colossians 3:23, 24)

YOU → JESUS CHRIST ← YOUR SPOUSE = BIBLICAL WORSHIP & TRUE JOY

Every relationship is accented in these several verses (Col. 3:18-4:1). The statements we make in this study are true regardless of the area, even though we are using marriage as one area of application. The relationship one has in marriage is built on the relationship one has in Christ. Our marriage relationship is to be a consequence of our relationship with Christ.

Modern Western medicine has had the tendency of treating symptoms without treating the underlying cause. We are slowly realizing that the reason why certain sicknesses exist is because of underlying problems, and the only way to fix the symptom is to treat the problem.

The marriage relationship is no different. People have problems in marriage and often they treat the symptoms, but ignore the underlying problem.¹ We might say to an individual, "You really need to obey your husband, or you really need to love your wife," but such counsel is a band-aid when what they really need is a heart transplant. Today, I would like us to start a heart transplant through mind renewal.

In the earlier years of marriage, I would read a lot of books on marriage. I was concerned that my marriage was not everything God expected, or at least I expected, or at least what I thought everyone else was expecting of my marriage. I found these books could not give me what I wanted. They were basically making me want to be married to the author rather than to my wife. So I stopped reading books about marriage. It was not until I learned the truth about Christ and the nature of His work, that I have found contentment in my marriage. Since that time we have experienced difficult circumstances, and yet my love for her and loyalty to her has never been greater.

In preparation for this study I once more visited books about

marriage and for the most part I am saddened by their content. One author wrote the following concerning being a wife:

Functioning as a professional in all areas of marriage is the essence of being a creative counterpart.²

If I were a wife, I would be completely frustrated with my inability to measure up to someone's idea of an ideal counterpart. Friend, there has to be a better way and it is my intent to show you the better way. Let us begin by noting Colossians 3:18-4:1.



Introduction

Consider with me this initial thought concerning Colossians 3:18-4:1. Depending on your mindset you will read this paragraph a certain way. Within the paragraph, there is a series of commands. If your mindset is toward the treatment of symptoms this is what you will see:

- Wives **submit** to your husbands (3:18)
- Husbands **love** your wives (3:19)
- **Do not be embittered** against them (3:19)
- Children **obey** your parents (3:20)
- Fathers **do not exasperate** your children (3:21)
- Slaves **obey** your masters on earth (3:22)
- Masters **grant justice and fairness** to your slaves (4:1)

Such a description might cause us to say, "Eureka, we found it. Herein lays the solution to our problematic relationship." we might walk away believing that the problem is our wife not submitting, or our husband not loving, but I believe the issue is greater than the lack of these fruits. To see the command in the absence of what is true is to look at the symptoms and not the underlying cause.

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With autumn comes the dropping of leaves by the trees. Trying to keep the imperatives of Scripture is like trying to pick up all of the leaves in your yard one-at-a-time. The task would be impossible, disheartening, and labor intensive. If we, however, hired someone to do it with a huge vacuum, the task would be completed in no time. If someone else paid for it to be done, that would be even better. God has paid for someone to pick-up all the leaves in our lives. All we have to do is enjoy the clean yard.

Chapters 3 and 4 in Colossians **show the consequence or result of**

positional truth. Almost without exception, the listing of Christ-like characteristics in chapters 3 and 4 are relational in nature. The truth of grace operates in the arena of relationships, and this is nowhere more seen than in the family unit.

What must not be forgotten in looking at **this paragraph of commands is that it is all working from what is true.** This foundational truth stretches all the way back to 1:27 and following. Notice the following thoughts.

- Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:27). All of who He is (1:15-19) is now working for you, not against you (Rom. 8:31)
- In Him you have been made complete (2:10)
- We have been buried with Him and raise up with Him (2:12)
- We have been made alive with Him (2:13)
- He has forgiven us all our transgressions (2:13)
- He defeated the devil and his cohorts (2:15)
- No one is to act as our judge in regard to spiritual disciplines (2:16)
- We have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world (3:20)
- We have been raised with Christ (3:1)
- We have died with Christ and our life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3)
- Christ is our life (3:4)

It is because of all these truths, this present reality, this glorious **position in Christ,** we now have the “Therefore” of 3:5. I should consider the members of my earthly body as dead, because I died with Christ. Look at what verses 5-17 are saying. It is because of chapters 1 and 2 that we have the exhortations of chapters 3 and 4.

All of these commands are nothing less or nothing more than spiritual fruit. And yet when you focus on the fruit, or lack thereof, you are focusing on the symptom and not the underlying cause for the fruit.

We are wired to want to do. We want real solutions to real problems, so the question is, “What do we have to do?” And the answer is, “Change the way we think.” Let us reflect on four short statements that are to form the bedrock of any marriage relationship.

WE WANT REAL SOLUTIONS TO REAL PROBLEMS, SO THE QUESTION IS, “WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?” AND THE ANSWER IS, “CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK.”



First, we must understand that Christ is to be the centerpiece of our lives (1:27, 2:12, 20, 3:1).

To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Col. 1:27).

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col. 2:12).

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as (Col. 2:20).

Therefore **if you have been raised up with Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1).

This is the foundation on which the fruit of Colossians 3:18-4:1 is built. The tree that produces this kind of fruit is planted in the soil of Jesus Christ. We no longer need anything that we do not already have. Christ is really the only one who matters. I love my wife and my children and my extended family. I love them all dearly, but I have always realized that of all my earthly relationships my wife is the only one that I have to actually live with. My kids will leave and I might have to manage my extended family, but my wife takes precedence over all other earthly relationships.

Yet even with my wife, I know that Jesus Christ must be the centerpiece of my life. The circumstances of life are highly volatile, and any relationship can be highly unpredictable. The one thing that is to be constant is Christ as the centerpiece of our lives. He is the anchor that keeps us from falling away.

The Heidelberg Catechism, written during the early years of the reformation in 1562, states the following:

Question 1: What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death (Rom 14:7-8), am not my own (1 Cor. 6:19), but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:23, Titus 2:14); who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins (1 Pet. 1:18-19, 1 John 1:7, 2:2,12), and delivered me from all the power of the devil (Heb 2:14, 1 John 3:8, John 8:34-36); and so preserves me (John 6:39, 10:28, 2 Thess. 3:3, 1 Pet. 1:5) that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head (Matt. 10:29-31, Luke 21:18; yea, that all things

must be subservient to my salvation (Rom. 8:28), and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life (2 Cor. 1:20-22, 2 Cor. 5:5, Eph. 1:13-14, Rom 8:16), and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him (Rom. 8:14, 1 John 3:3).

If we do not know Jesus Christ as our own Savior from sin, death, and hell, then Christ is not the centerpiece of our relationships. It is only as **we accept Him as our one and only Savior** that He becomes the acknowledged centerpiece of our lives and of our relationships. This leads us to our second short statement that is to form the bedrock of our marriage relationship.



Second, we must understand that we have died and our lives are now hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3, 4).

³ For you have died and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.** ⁴ **When Christ, who is our life,** is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Col. 3:3, 4).

What does this mean? Simply put, this means that our wants and our desires are no longer primary. Regrettably, we live as if we are owed a nice house, a good job, obedient children, a comfortable existence, and a wonderful spouse. If we understand the Bible correctly and see life from God's perspective, then we come to understand that we deserve nothing short of damnation. Our American ideology cultivates a spirit of entitlement that is flawed and dangerous. It has infected all of our relationships and especially so that of marriage. It is because of this unsound ideology we live with discouragement and discontentment. Most of our frustration in marriage is due to failed expectations. We believed that the person we married would be able to meet our needs and fulfill our wants. Realistically, as wonderful as our spouses are, they can never do for us what only God can. Our focus is wrong.

Consider this idea. Have you ever been real hungry and saved yourself for dinner at one of your favorite places only to be served a meal that failed to meet your expectations? Why were you disappointed? You were disappointed because it did not meet your expectations. However, what would happen if you were starving and were served the same meal, then how would you feel? You would be very grateful and satisfied. The issue is one of perspective.

We are not asking to lower one's standard, but rather to change the object of our affection.

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Our problem is that we are expecting our spouses to be for us what only God can be for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Listen carefully to Bob George in his work, *Victory over Depression: How to Live above your Circumstances*.

Like our emotions, unrealistic expectations toward life and other people aren't unusual. We come into this world with the idea that everything and everyone is here to make us happy. By nature we are self-centered.³

Unrealistic expectations arise when we don't face life as it really is, but instead look at life and people as we think they *should* be.⁴

Misplaced dependencies result when a person depends upon someone or something other than God for his happiness, self-worth or meaning in life. Misplaced dependencies naturally follow unrealistic expectations. If you expect your spouse to meet all your needs and make you happy, then you will depend upon her for your happiness.⁵

When we get all twisted up and bent out of shape, it is because we believe our rights have been violated and we have been mistreated. Our problem is we do not see ourselves as dead. The part in us that is having a problem is our completely self-centered old nature. We must see ourselves as dead. This leads us to the third short statement that is to form the bedrock of our marriage relationship.



Third, we must understand that the marriage relationship is not about us and our needs, but about Him and His glory (3:17).

Whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father** (Col. 3:17).

The obedience of fruit bearing is for His glory (Matt. 5:16). In the midst of this whole relationship, what do you think God's goal is? Do you think it is your own preconceived notion of what constitutes personal happiness and contentment? Or do you believe it to be something bigger than your own understanding of personal happiness? I think it is something bigger than you and me. I believe that the situation you find yourself in is for His glory.

If you believe God is sovereign and capable of changing your spouse, then why does He not do it? Every time you pray for God to change your spouse, you believe that He can act on their will in such a

way as to bring about change. But why is God not answering your prayers? I believe it is because He is working something in them and through them to you. God is working grace to you in the midst of your marriage relationship. And what He is working will ultimately bring Him glory. This leads us to the fourth short statement that is to form the bedrock of our marriage relationship.



Fourth, we must not focus on what God is or is not working in our spouse's life, but rather focus on God and live expecting God to work in us and through us His fruit to our spouse (3:24).

Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. **It is the Lord Christ whom you serve** (Col. 3:24).

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, age 5, Ryan, age 3. The boys began to argue over whom would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.'" Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!" This is how we often are in marriage. We want our spouse to be Jesus.

Our focus in marriage is not to see our wives submit to our every wish and desire, but rather for God to work in us and through us His love to them. But our vision is to go even further than this. Our vision is fixed on Him who is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). We believe God to make us the kind of husband and father He wants us to be for our wife and children.

Do we believe this? Do we believe this even when our experience tells us otherwise? Are we going to make a covenant with the truth?

- Remember when you decided that you wanted to marry? This did not make you married.
- Remember when you first met your future spouse and it first occurred to you that this person could be your spouse? This did not make you married.
- Remember when you asked her to marry you and then you got married? Then you were married, but not until then.

You and I can believe all this, but until we really lay hold of it, we will continue to struggle in our relationships.



APPLICATION: (Making the Transfer)

We are dead to ourselves and the world and we are alive in Christ. The listing of the commands is what the resurrected life looks like. **Paul never separates our performance from our position.** If we look at the above mentioned commands in the absence of what has already been taught, it will lead to bondage and failure.

Our choice (as a husband) to love, expressing itself in acts of love, is the outworking of His life in us and through us to our wives. We choose to love and act accordingly because He is willing us to choose and act.

This thinking makes our choosing a “delightful duty.” It excites us to know that God is working in us and through us in the context of the family unit. We know we are not able to love our wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25), but we know of One who can and will and His name is Jesus.

Often in the family relationship, we stop with what we see. All we see is a wife, or a husband, or a child, yet the passage pushes us beyond the immediate and temporal and calls us to someone higher. Remember the earlier reading of the paragraph and the emphasis on the command? Let us now see it from a different perspective. Let us consider it from God’s perspective.

- Wives submit to your husbands (3:18)
 - **AS IS FITTING IN THE LORD**
- Husbands love your wives (3:19)
- Do not be embittered against them (3:19)
- Children obey your parents (3:20)
 - **FOR THIS IS WELL-PLEASING TO THE LORD**
- Fathers do not exasperate your children (3:21)
- Slaves obey your masters on earth (3:22)
 - **WITH SINCERITY OF HEART, FEARING THE LORD**
 - **WHATEVER YOU DO, DO YOUR WORK HEARTILY, AS FOR THE LORD RATHER THAN FOR MEN**
 - **IT IS THE LORD CHRIST WHOM YOU SERVE**
- Masters grant justice and fairness to your slaves (4:1)
 - **YOU TOO HAVE A MASTER IN HEAVEN**

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Our service to the Lord is through people and those people are often the ones closest to us. When we understand how our lives are swallowed up in His, then when we serve our wives, children, employer,

and peers, we are actually serving the Lord.

Because we have separated and compartmentalized life, we fail to see Him in all things. Yet, He is there. Colossians 3:24 reminds us of what is ours **in Christ**.

²⁴ Knowing that **from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance**. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Col. 3:24).

What a joy it is to know that Christ is completing His work in us and through us to those around us. It is with joy that we as husbands love our wives, and as fathers seek to encourage our children. Our joy is found in knowing that as we serve them, we serve the Lord. Herein is the secret to our contentment.

Perhaps today you find yourself struggling as a wife, husband, parent, child, employee, or employer. Friend, your struggle is simply a symptom.

The real issue is rooted in . . .

- Not seeing Christ as the centerpiece of your life
- Not seeing yourself as dead and your life hidden with Christ in God
- Your own self-centeredness and not seeing His glory as the end of all relationships
- Looking at your spouse instead of focusing on Christ and His work in you

Laying hold of this truth will not resolve every relational conflict, but it will give you a platform for peace and rest, and it will enable you to really love your spouse. The relationship you have with your spouse is a life long relationship that is like the plant described earlier. If it is embedded in the soil of positional truth, it is alive and has the potential to grow.

¹ Most books written that appeal to improving one's marriage approach it from a pragmatic perspective. They are almost exclusively written from a "cause-affect" formula. They offer what is observable, down-to-earth, and will "potential" work toward remedying the problem. Such "fixes" are temporal and a-biblical. They are **not anti-biblical**, only outside the scope of biblical revelation.

² Linda Dillow, *Creative Counterpart* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977), 15.

³ Bob George, *Victory over Depression: How to Live above your Circumstances* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.