

Christ in the Home

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0:00] seated. Well, good morning, church. Our sermon text today is Colossians chapter 3, verse 17, through chapter 4, verse 1. That's page 984 in the Pew Bible. Let's go ahead and turn there together.

As James mentioned, this morning is something of a special Sunday because we have three people getting baptized. Now, baptism in the New Testament is the means of publicly professing faith in Jesus Christ. It's an outward sign that through trusting in Jesus, we've been cleansed of our sin, we've been raised to new life in Him, and we've been made a part of His body, His church, and the world. And part of what baptism is meant to do, part of the reason why Jesus gave us baptism is as a way of speaking assurance to our hearts. Baptism is a word of assurance from God that His promises of grace in the gospel are as real and as certain to us as this wet water that washes over us. It's a beautiful thing. And in a little bit, Gary and Daniel and Chuck are going to come up, and they're going to do just that. They're going to profess their faith in Christ and get baptized as a sign of all that Christ has done for them. You'll notice in the order of service that Sam Stevens was also scheduled to get baptized today, but his dad, Jeff, couldn't make it. He's actually caring for a family member in the hospital this morning. So have no fear, we will reschedule Sam's baptism soon, which means that if you would like to get baptized, there's a date going to be coming up where that can take place. So if you've placed your trust in Christ and you haven't been baptized yet, come talk to me after the service. We'd love to talk about next steps. So baptism is a sign of our new life in Christ. And if you've been here at Trinity the last few weeks, you know that we've been walking through Colossians chapter 3, which is all about living out this new life that we have through faith in Christ. And what our text today is going to show us actually is that there is no sphere of life that is off limits from the lordship of Jesus and from this new life that we have in

Christ. In fact, we're going to see that living out this radical new creation life starts at home. So why don't we pray together and then I'll read Colossians starting in chapter 3, verse 17. Let's pray.

Our God, we do thank you for the glorious hope that we've just sung about in Christ that one day he will return and we will be able to say it is well with our soul because you have forgiven all of our sins and you've given us a living hope through your Holy Spirit. Father, now as we come to your word, we pray that you would grant us your Holy Spirit that we might understand it or that our hearts would be receptive to what your Spirit is saying to us that we might see the goodness and the glory of what it means to live out this new life in Christ together. We pray for your help in this in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, picking up Colossians chapter 3, verse 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. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, 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. Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

[3 : 40] You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven.

Well, in one of his parables, Jesus once described the kingdom of God like a mustard seed. A mustard seed, Jesus said in this parable, is one of the smallest of all the seeds, and yet a man took that seed and planted it in a field, and that small seed took root and grew and became a tree, larger than all the other garden plants, big enough for the birds of the air to come and make nests in its branches and to find safety in its shade.

In other words, what Jesus is saying here is that the world-changing reign of God and the gospel often starts with something simple, something small, something seemingly insignificant.

But from that small start, it has the power to grow and to change things forever, and to even bring blessing to the world. In verse 17, where we started our reading, Paul hits the climax of his description of the new life, the new humanity that we've become in Christ.

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. That is a sweeping, awe-inspiring statement, isn't it? It makes you want to just go win the world for Christ, right?

[5 : 15] And cure cancer and end poverty and plant churches for the sake of his name, to dream big dreams for Jesus' sake. And that's a good desire. But surprisingly, Paul's first application of this radical new life is in a much more mundane, everyday, seemingly insignificant sphere of our home, of our household relationships.

It's as if Paul is saying if the new life in Christ is going to mean anything at all, it has to impact our real relationships. The transformation that happens through the gospel of grace has to start like a seed in the mundane, everyday relationships right at home.

Then isn't it true that those relationships closest to us are often the most difficult? Do you remember the part in *To Kill a Mockingbird* when Scout is talking to Miss Maudie about her father Atticus and she says, Atticus don't ever do anything to Jem and me in the house that he don't do in the yard.

In other words, she's saying that her father's character is the same in private as it is in public. What he does in the yard for everyone to see is the same as in the house where no one can see.

But how many of us could say that that's always true in our own case for our own selves? Our family members often see the worst side of us, don't they?

[6 : 49] But if the gospel can make a difference there, if it can change our relationships at home, then the seed will really take root, become a tree, and maybe even start to turn the world upside down.

So this passage is showing us what it looks like to live the new life in Christ in our most everyday relationships, which are also our most challenging relationships, our relationships with our family, with our household.

Now in order to do justice to this text with the short time that we have before we go to baptism, I want to start with kind of a wide angle view of the passage, and then I want to zoom into the particulars, and then I want to come back out again to see the whole.

So first, let's take a wide angle lens. What do we learn taking this passage as a whole? Now for starters, a typical Greco-Roman household in the first century was a bit broader than ours today.

You'd have a husband and wife and children, but often extended family too, and of course you'd have a number of household servants to keep everything running. Remember, this was in the age before modern technology. No one had a dishwasher or a washer and dryer in the first century, so it took quite a staff to run a big household.

[8 : 02] And that's why Paul's instructions here include not just husbands and wives and parents and children, but also servants and masters as well. It was all seen as part of the household. And Paul wasn't the only writer in his day to give directions on what household relationships should look like.

There were Greek and Roman and Jewish writers who offered their own version of what an ideal household should be, or at least they would give advice on how the father ought to run them. But when you compare Paul in the New Testament with those texts of the broader culture, you start to see just how radical, just how countercultural Paul in the New Testament was.

Paul isn't simply cutting and pasting the cultural conventions of his day. No, the radical preeminence of Christ that we've been studying in Colossians, the liberating power of the gospel is at work, even here in the household codes.

For example, consider the status of the more societally vulnerable members of the family. Wives, children, servants.

In many household codes of the day, these family members are clearly seen as inferior, and often they weren't even addressed directly at all. They weren't even worth talking to.

[9 : 25] But for Paul in the New Testament, they are human beings made in God's image, addressed as those with dignity and responsibility. After all, Paul's directions to the household, as we've said, comes in the context of the rest of chapter 3.

Do you remember verse 11 of chapter 3? Here, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

All. Or consider Paul's teaching about our equal status as members of Christ from Galatians 3, verses 27 and 28. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is not male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. This is the soil out of which all of our Christian relationships grow.

Our oneness and our equal dignity and worth in Christ. So, wives, children, servants, they aren't inferior. They aren't just tools to be used. They are God's image bearers and Christ's own fellow heirs of the kingdom.

[10 : 41] But consider, too, how Paul addresses the more powerful or privileged person in each of these three pairs of relationships.

Consider how he addresses the husband, the father, the parent, and the master. You know, many household codes of the day would have granted the head of the household, the paterfamilias, complete, unquestioned authority in the home.

Patria potestas, paternal power, to do as he wished. But, notice how Paul has something very, very different to say.

To those in positions of power and authority, husbands, parents, masters, he commands love and gentleness and justice.

This is what real Christ-like leadership looks like. They are to use positions of authority not to advance their own desires, but to promote the flourishing and renewal of God's image in others.

[11 : 52] They're ultimately to seek the good of the other rather than their own, even if and when it is costly. Now, before we zoom in and look at how this gets fleshed out in these three very different pairs of relationships, let's pause on these two broad observations that we've just seen.

First, we see that to be under authority does not steal or diminish one's dignity or worth. Second, to be in authority means to be responsible, to act in love, understanding, and justice towards those under your care that they might truly flourish.

And if that was countercultural in Paul's day, it certainly still is today, is it not? On the one hand, too often we link dignity and worth to social status, position, or privilege.

But that is just not so. Our dignity comes from being made in God's image and being redeemed and loved by Christ. And you know, that actually frees us to come under authority when appropriate without any threat to our identity, without any diminishment to our worth.

On the other hand, too often we think that being in authority means that we get to call the shots and everyone else has to obey. That others have to bend their wills around our needs and our desires.

[13:20] But this is not the biblical picture of how authority is meant to be held. It is meant to be sacrificially exercised for the other's good.

And this is why abuses of authority are so heinous and so wrong. You see, the New Testament condemns self-seeking uses of authority. Those kind of uses of authority that would exploit or take advantage of others for our own gain, our own pleasure.

And it is very right to speak out against such abuses of authority. What real authority looks like is not others bending their wills around our needs, but being in a position to sacrificially bend our wills around their needs, especially those who are vulnerable.

So that's the broad view. Now, let's take a close-up. Let's zoom in. First, Paul addresses husbands and wives. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. This is verse 18.

Verse 19, And husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. So here we have a picture of submission and love. In other words, our new life in Christ changes the marriage relationship from one of adversarial coexistence to deferential loving friendship.

[14:40] Now, of course, it is a massive understatement to say that the language of submission is not very popular today. Right? I mean, submission is probably like one of five words that we just utterly despise as a culture.

Can we just say that? Let's admit that. Okay, good. All right. We're all being honest. But you know, when the New Testament tells wives to submit to their husbands, it does not mean that wives are simply to always say, yes, dear, and then be a doormat to get walked all over.

Neither seen nor heard. This is not in any way what the Bible means by submission. Think of Adam and Eve in the garden.

I think that will give us a better picture of submission in marriage. Adam had a mission to fulfill. But it became clear very quickly that he could not do it on his own.

Eve was created as his strong ally with strengths and gifts to help Adam fulfill their God-given mission. And so submission means becoming your husband's first and best ally in pursuit of your God-given mission.

[15:53] But it isn't one-sided. Husbands are meant to love their wives, which was an unheard-of command in the first century.

No husband was told to love their wife in a household code. And yet here comes Paul crashing through. And love here means putting down our rights for the sake of the other, finding one's joy, as it were, in the joy of your spouse.

And so you see there's a reciprocity that begins to emerge in a Christ-centered marriage like a dance. Yes, the husband takes the lead. He sets the pace. But his aim is the flourishing and the good of his wife in love.

And the wife following his lead in the dance brings all her strengths to bear to help him pursue his God-given purpose as well. And lest you think that is just me, a 21st century pastor, kind of reading this in the most positive way possible.

Listen to John Chrysostom in the 5th century who is commenting on this passage. He sees the exact same thing. He says, So husbands and wives, how is your dance?

[17:25] In what ways, wives, do you need to reaffirm to your husband your glad and strong support of what God has called him to? That you are beside him in the battle every step of the way, your sword drawn, ready to fight at his side.

And in what ways, husbands, do you need to reaffirm to your wife that you take delight in her? That you find your highest earthly joy in seeing her flourish?

That you would gladly spend and be spent for her sake. How's your dance, friends? Let's go on to the second relationship between fathers or parents and children.

Paul says, Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged. Our new life in Christ changes the parent-child relationship from one of a frustrated battle of wills to one of trusting obedience and soul-stirring encouragement.

Children are to obey their parents in everything, not questioning or doubting or second-guessing everything they say. Now, of course, Paul is assuming that the parents here are godly parents, that they aren't asking the child to do anything that would be disobedient to God.

[18:42] In all cases, in any relationship, we must obey God rather than men, as Acts 5.29 says. That goes, in other words, without saying in all of these commands that Paul gives. Also, Paul is here talking about children who are still dependent and living under their parents' care and protection.

He's talking about household here. When it comes to adult children, of course, they should still honor their parents in everything, but the call isn't to necessarily obey them in the exact same ways that you would if you were still living under their care and under their home as a child.

But here at home, Paul's pretty clear, children should obey. And they should do so because it pleases the Lord. Now, let me speak directly to the kids and teenagers for a second.

Guys, imagine if you had someone in your life who loved you more than you could imagine, who had your best interests at heart, and who was much, much wiser in life than you.

I mean, wouldn't that be perfect? Wouldn't you want to listen to that person and maybe even do what they said? I mean, if Tom Brady showed up at your football practice and was like, okay, here's how you throw a pass, you would not be like, ugh, Tom Brady's so controlling.

[20:03] Why won't he let me live my life? Of course not. You'd be like, okay, Tom, show me again. Am I getting it right? Man, it's so great to have you here. You're so wise.

You just care for me. It's awesome. Now, look, I know you don't think your parents are Tom Brady. I get it. But they're a lot wiser than you think.

And your life will go so much better if you listen to them and, yes, obey them. But here's the thing, ultimately. This is why you should do it.

Not because it pleases your parents and not because it will make your life go better, though it will, but ultimately because it pleases the Lord. The sovereign God who made you and loves you and left heaven to come to earth to rescue you actually finds joy when you honor and obey your parents.

Do it not because your parents are cool. They're probably not. Do it because it pleases the Lord. And parents, don't be afraid to require obedience of your kids.

- [21 : 22] You're helping them please the Lord. Now, parents, you have a part to play in this as well. It's possible, as Paul says in this passage, to discourage your kids, which the word kind of means to suck the spirit right out of them.

When we're overly harsh or demanding, when we refuse to accept them and praise them for who they are, or what's worse, when we compare them negatively to other kids, why can't you be more like your brother?

When we don't tune in to their desires and gifts and instead try to relive our lives through them, all of that in many other ways is a form of provoking them.

And Paul's very insightful here. He says, it will shut them down. Now, I know that a lot of parents feel pretty much perpetual guilt because we feel like we're messing up constantly with our kids.

And let me just say this morning that the grace of Christ covers even your parenting mess-ups. And God hasn't made a mistake in giving you as the parent to your kids.

- [22 : 39] God knows what he's doing. And rather than beating yourself up, think of a way you can encourage your kids this week. Pick something they've worked hard at, even if they haven't done a great job.

Pick something they've worked hard at or that you appreciate about them and tell them how proud you are of them and how much you're thankful for them. Now, look, they might respond with a, yeah, sure, whatever, Dad.

Whatever, Mom. But it will mean more than you think. It will be the seed that gets sown. Well, let's move on to the third relationship, servants and masters.

Now, we won't be able to spend a lot of time here. And there are some good applications that we can make to our own modern workplaces, the relationship between employers and employees. But rather than kind of go into all that, maybe that's something you can talk about over lunch or later this week.

I want to say a quick word about a question that comes up in relation to this passage and others like it in the New Testament. And that question is, is Paul approving of slavery here?

- [23 : 45] He's talking to slaves and masters. Is he okay with it? Well, the short answer to that question is no. But let me unpack that with three points.

First, in this passage, and others like it in the New Testament, Paul is giving practical advice on how to live within the existing social conditions of the day, not commenting directly on the rightness or wrongness of slavery itself.

In other words, he's saying, look, here's where you find yourself. Here's how to live in that situation. He's not saying, here's what I think of slavery. So it's wrong to think that Paul's description of how to live under a certain fallen human system equals an approval of the system itself.

The Bible has a lot to say about how to bear up under persecution, but it's not very positive or approving of persecution of Christians. Second, when we hear the word slavery today, we can't help but think of 18th and 19th century race-based chattel slavery.

And when we look at the New Testament, when we look at Paul's writings, we find that he explicitly condemns at least two of the main features of that evil institution.

- [25 : 03] First, the New Testament is very clear that racism in all forms is wrong. Both in creation and in redemption, the Bible teaches us that people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are equal.

And in fact, the vision of heaven that we have in Revelation is of people of every tribe and tongue and nation united around the throne of God and praise on equal terms.

So racism is clearly condemned by Paul in the rest of the New Testament. And in 1 Timothy 1, verse 10, Paul explicitly condemns what he calls enslavers, who are people who would take someone captive in order to sell them into slavery.

Which is what so much of our 17th, 18th, 19th century institution of slavery was based on. And Paul in the rest of the Bible comes right out and says, that is utterly, utterly wrong.

So Paul would have flatly condemned what we think of as slavery today. Third point. Slavery in Paul's day had a much broader meaning than it does today. For example, in the first century, slaves could own property.

[26 : 19] Many could earn enough money to purchase their own freedom. Some were given positions of relative honor in the families that they served. However, even with that being the case, what Paul and the other apostles taught in the gospel eventually led to the dismantling and the abolishment of all forms of slavery.

Just consider the passage here in Colossians for a second. What is the underlying message of Paul's advice to servants and masters? It's that they ultimately all have one master in heaven, the Lord Jesus.

Ultimately, they serve the same master and must both answer to him. And their heavenly Lord Jesus demands, in chapter 4, verse 1, that earthly masters treat their servants with justice and equity to view them with equal dignity and respect not just as God's image bearers in creation but also as fellow heirs of the kingdom of God in redemption.

Now, friends, how on earth could one continue to treat a fellow image bearer and co-heir of the kingdom of God justly and fairly while still owning them as a slave?

As the implications of the gospel were unpacked, as the seed took root and grew, slavery would have to fall. So the gospel planted the seeds that eventually brought the system down.

[27 : 56] Let's conclude by zooming out once again. Throughout the passage, there's a constant refrain, isn't there? Seven times in this short passage, Paul speaks of the Lord.

Husbands and wives, do what's fitting in the Lord. Parents and children, do what's pleasing to the Lord. Servants should work ultimately for the Lord and not for men. And earthly masters should remember that they too have a master, the Lord Jesus in heaven and there's no partiality with him.

What reframes and reorients all of our relationships, even and especially our household relationships, is our relationship to the Lord Jesus. Jesus. After all, don't these commands require that we lay down our selfishness and serve the people before us?

Where does the power come from to do that? Paul's been whispering it and saying it the whole time from our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

It's because the Lord Jesus willingly submitted himself to the Father's will for us that wives can willingly submit to their husbands in Christ. It's because the Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself for us that husbands can love and lay down their lives for their wives.

[29 : 18] It's because the Lord Jesus obeyed his heavenly Father perfectly on our behalf that we can seek to please him by obeying our earthly parents. It's because the Lord Jesus is so gentle and caring with us, never breaking the bruised reed, never quenching the smoldering wick, that we can be gentle and understanding with our children.

It's because the Lord Jesus humbled himself and took on the form of a servant dying on the cross for us that even when we find ourselves in situations of injustice, we can still be faithful under it and serve the Lord Jesus.

It's because the Lord has liberated us from our sins and freed us from guilt and condemnation, set us free that we can treat others with justice and fairness even to the point of setting them free at great cost to ourselves.

And so the whole of the Christian life, even down to our most basic relationships in the home, are meant to flow out of who Christ is and what he's done. And that means knowing Christ and being in him transfigures and transforms even our most mundane relationships and makes them windows and displays of his glorious grace.

Do you know what that's like? More importantly, have you experienced his grace for yourself? Perhaps this morning as you've been walking through this text, God's been moving on your heart and perhaps you've been considering how far short you fall of what real God-honoring relationships are supposed to look like.

[31 : 02] Perhaps you realize that the ones you're closest to are the ones you've hurt the most. And when that starts to sink in, you start to wonder, could God ever forgive me?

And is it possible to have this new life? Well, friends, hear the good news of the gospel. That in Christ, there is full and free forgiveness.

And you, who were dead in trespasses, Paul says in Colossians, God made alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This, he set aside, nailing it to the cross. All of your wrongs, all of your failures, all the ways in which you've hurt those closest to you, Christ has taken, nailed to his own cross, and borne away so that you can have his righteousness and forgiveness and freedom and new life.

That is true for all who place their faith in Christ. And that invitation stands open for you today to place your trust in him and to receive his forgiveness and new life.

[32 : 18] And as we celebrate baptism this morning, it's right for us who've been baptized to remember our baptism, to remember what it signifies and what it means that we've died and risen with Christ, that the old is gone, that the new has come, and in remembering that to be hopeful.

Perhaps you're discouraged this morning at how your household relationships have been, Christian. Perhaps you don't see much of Christ in them at the moment. But don't despair.

What small, mustard seed-like act can you take today, take this week, in the power of the Holy Spirit to begin sowing toward Christ-like relationships?

You have put off the old self. You have put on the new. You are a new creation in Christ. Live into that this week. Perhaps the first step is to seek forgiveness from the family member that you've been failing to relate to in the way Paul shows us here.

Perhaps it's to finally grant forgiveness to that family member and to begin again in the grace of Christ. And as the parable of Jesus reminds us, we must never underestimate these small acts of submission, of love, of patience, of kindness, of obedience.

[33 : 49] These are the things that grow. That grow like mustard seeds until our homes and all of our relationships become like mighty trees with branches spreading out, offering shade and shelter in our weary world.

Imagine if our households could radiate with the grace of Christ like this passage talks about. Surely our neighbors would be intrigued and attracted to what they see, wouldn't they?

Surely the church would be strengthened and blessed by the overflow of grace. Surely Christ would be honored as we do it all in his name. But it doesn't just end at home. It keeps going.

The call for us in our baptism and our discipleship of Christ and our life together as a church is to take this grace into all of our relationships, into every corner of life, to keep going until you find that whatever you do in word or deed, you do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him and then all of life becomes a display of his glorious grace.

Let's pray. Father, we confess this morning that many parts of this passage strike us as hard.

[35 : 16] Lord, just as it was a countercultural word in Paul's day, so it is for ours. Would you help us, Lord, to have hearts that are shaped and humbled and empowered by your Holy Spirit to see the goodness in these words, to know that we can trust you?

Lord, how could we not trust you having sent your own son to die for us? How can you not have our best in mind? Help us to see the goodness in these words, God, and help us by your Spirit to lay aside the selfishness and the old ways that would want us to continue to live for ourselves and help us to put on the new self to live lives of love and peace and thanksgiving with those who are closest to us?

And Father, as we celebrate baptism this morning, we pray that this joyous occasion would speak assurance to the hearts of Chuck and Daniel and Gary and Lord, to all of us this morning.

We pray this, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, let's do just that. Let me invite Charles and Daniel and Gary to come on up.

Come on up, guys. So Gary and Daniel are going to share their testimony. Chuck's testimony is in the bulletin.

[36 : 43] You can see it there. He shares there that he grew up