

And The Nuts And Bolts

Colossians: Christ Above All

By Dr. D. Ralph Davis

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Colossians 3:18-4:6
Preached on: Sunday, January 4, 2015

First Presbyterian Church
1324 Marion St
Columbia, SC 29201

Website: www.firstprescolumbia.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/fpccolumbia

Our Scripture this evening comes from Colossians 3:18-4:6. Colossians 3, and beginning to read at verse 18.

18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, maintain your habit of loving your wives, and do not be bitter toward them. 20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, lest they should lose heart. 22 Slaves, obey in all things your masters on the human level, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work with gusto, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that it's from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. You serve Christ as your Master. 25 For the one who does wrong will receive the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

1 Masters, grant to your slaves what is right and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping awake in it with thanksgiving. 3 Praying at the same time also for us, that God might open for us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, on which account I am also in chains-- 4 that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak. 5 Go on walking in wisdom toward those on the outside, snapping up the opportunity. 6 Your speech must always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you might know how you ought to return an answer to each one.

I was in a German university and there was a big faculty to-do, they had a banquet and they had the various faculties of the university there and there was one fellow who, obviously this was a few years back, there was one fellow there by the name of Max N. who was over 90 years old; he was a famous neurologist and apparently had invented shock therapy during WWI and he was quite an institution in himself. Then happened to come into the room a fellow who was about 80 years old who was the President of the City Parliament and he made a beeline for Professor N. Some of the younger faculty members thought, "Oh, we have to see this. As these two oldsters get together, who knows what they're going to be talking about. There may be some gem of wisdom, there

may be some scientific dilemma or whatever that they're going to talk about." So they gathered round as close as they could but all that one of them could hear was this 90+ year old man saying to his friend, "Are you able to still put on your own trousers? I can." It was just a detail, just one of those picky things of everyday life.

That's sort of what you have in the text before us. Colossians 3:18-4:6, we're down to the nuts and bolts of the Christian life, the sort of daily detail stuff, but I want you to know how this fits in. You remember last week we were looking at verse 17 at the end, "all, whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus and that's a very comprehensive summary like statement and so on, and it sounds good but what does it mean? Well, I want you to know that verse 17 controls what comes after it. Verse 17 controls chapter 3, verse 18, through chapter 4, verse 6, that is, it's telling you whatever you do in the name of the Lord Jesus, you're to do it, whatever word or deed, you're to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus and then it specs out the different realms in which you're to do these things in the name of the Lord Jesus. You do it in the name of the Lord Jesus in your relations and in your devotions and in your witness. So chapter 3, verse 17, isn't just a kind of a bland throw-away line, it's the concept that controls everything that comes after it in this next section.

So if you're to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, you're to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus in your relations, first of all, chapter 3, verse 18, through chapter 4, verse 1. Now, you're very familiar with this kind of thing in the epistles. He mentions three relations and the first, of course, is marriage in verses 18 and 19 and he begins, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord." Now, you know, everybody tends to go berserk or some people do over that, but that "submit yourselves" is a key word of Christian ethics in the New Testament. Look at 1 Peter and you'll find that. This idea of submitting yourselves does not mean inferiority and it certainly doesn't mean what you might call doormatism. The word is used of Christ himself. In 1 Corinthians 15:28, it talks about the time when Christ will reign and put all his enemies under his feet and then he shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father and so on, and it says that then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him. So Christ will be subject to the Father and so on when he delivers the kingdom up to him.

There is no doubt. That doesn't mean that God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is inferior to the Father. Colossians 1 already spelled out Christ's deity so Christ the Son is just as fully deity as God the Father is and yet he submits himself to the Father. You even have that in Christ's earthly life when he said, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." And he said in John 8:29, "I always do what pleases him, that is, the Father." Jesus, the Son, submits to the Father. He's equal with the Father in deity and power and glory. There is no inferiority in those terms of the Son over against the Father, as it were, but he submits himself. When there is the relationship within the Trinity, there is a mutual submission and so on, especially submission of the Son to the Father. It doesn't mean he's inferior in any way but in the confines of that holy, godly relationship, he submits himself to the Father.

Crass analogies probably aren't very good but if I play first base for a baseball team, I have a manager. Just because he's the manager, doesn't make him of more intrinsic value than me, the first baseman. I'm made and created in the image of God, he is created in the image of God and there is an essential equality but in the parameters of that relationship of manager and first baseman, I submit to his direction. He has the right of control and of command in that relationship and so in the marriage relationship, the wife submitting does not mean she's essentially inferior or anything of the kind. That certainly doesn't mean that she's a doormat or anything like that, but it does mean that within the parameters of that relationship, God has placed the husband in the place of responsibility and for the order of that relationship, she therefore submits to him in that.

Now, she doesn't have to worry about that submission if the husband does what verse 19 tells him to do. But of course, this may not be a piece of cake for the Christian wife in the first century church because it could be a mixed marriage. I mean, mixed by conversion. It's conceivable that a woman who was a Christian in the early church came to faith in Jesus and so on and she became a Christian and her husband is still a pagan and yet she's supposed to submit? That can be tough sometimes. This is no easy affair, but if your husband is a Christian and there are Christian husbands, verse 19, the Christian husbands are "to maintain the habit of loving your wives and do not be bitter toward them." Now, so you have these reciprocal duties, don't you? You don't need to fear carrying out your responsibility if it's met by the other person carrying out his responsibility as directed by the Lord.

Now, you wouldn't find this in what we call Hellenistic or Greek or pagan household codes. There are these household codes, as they're sometimes called, that have these lists of duties and so on like this. But in the Greek or even in the Jewish ones, you wouldn't find husbands love your wives or maintain the habit of loving your wives as a rule, they always stressed the privileges and the authority and the position of the husband but, you see, Christ makes the difference. Husbands, maintain the habit of loving your wives. That's the difference.

Now, notice that Paul particularizes this. He says, "and do not be bitter toward them." In other words, that's not all of what's involved in loving your wife but that's one particular by which you can maybe test it. Okay, that's not everything, but it keeps it from being all general. "Don't be bitter against them." What that tells you, you see, is that loving your wife is not just getting her under the mistletoe, although there's nothing wrong with that at all, but it involves more than that. Don't be bitter against them.

Now, that probably deals with both attitude and action. Don't be bitter, literally, against them tells you that you don't harbor resentment and so on and anger toward them, but it also may mean bitterness in action as well. Some of your translations read, "Don't be harsh with them," so it's talking sometimes of bitterness that overflows in harshness. That certainly forbids, doesn't it, verbal tirades, verbal abuse, and it certainly forbids physical abuse, doesn't it? It certainly forbids any professing Christian man would strike his wife. Only a coward would do something like that and any professing Christian man that does that ought to ask himself, "How does the love of God dwell in me if I do that?" That's far

more prevalent and far more of a problem even in the church than many of us are probably aware or willing to admit, but that has no place if you're maintaining the habit of loving your wife and so on.

I sometimes if there would be an authenticated case of that in a church, of course, that's where maybe you need to have some church discipline. I tend to think that for cases like that, we need to have about three deacons at least who are big and strong and fairly mean and they would just visit such a fellow at his home and take him out to the back 40 behind his house and sort of educate him about how he shouldn't do that anymore. Now, that's not in the New Testament and you won't find it there. It's just something I was thinking about that might be an effective way of dealing with that kind of thing which is a dire dire problem in our own day.

So, you have him saying, what Paul is saying here, he's not saying that you have to have the most fabulous communication skills. He's not saying that you have to enjoy the most intense intimacy in your marriage. He's not saying that you have to have the most moving tenderness. He just says, "Your marriage ought to at least look like this. You ought to be able to do this."

Now, he mentions another relation and that has to do with family, verses 20 and 21, and you notice that he addresses children. "Children, obey your parents in all things for this well-pleasing in the Lord." Children are accountable. Children are addressed here and we're always concerned about if there are exceptions. He says, "obey your parents in all things." Well, are there any times when I shouldn't? Paul is just addressing the general position here, he's not talking about exceptions. Of course, if your parents command you to do something that's contrary to the word of God, you don't do it. You obey God rather than men. That doesn't need to be written in there. You don't have to put little codicils in it every point; it kind of blunts the point anyway but that's understood. But you may not like what you have to do and so on, but you do it because it's "well-pleasing in the Lord."

Now, sometimes in our culture in any case, we find, especially when children get a little bit older in their teenage years and they have a little bit more freedom and should have and so on, sometimes there can become tensions and so on. I can recall a time when a son came in later than he was supposed to come in on a Saturday night. There was a pretty generous allowance but there was an hour when he was not supposed to be out beyond that, he was to be in, and he fudged on that and when I brought it up to his attention, he wasn't real happy about that requirement. Well, sometimes you sort of have to say, "You know, I just want you to know you don't have to live here. I can give you \$100 and you can go out and you can go and stay where you want and go in when you want and so on. But if you're going to live in this house, then you're going to abide by the house rules. You don't have to like it, you just have to do it." Well, sometimes you may need to say things like that because it gets to tension points, doesn't it, occasionally and we have to be clear about those things.

But what Paul says is he balances this in verse 21, "Fathers, don't exasperate your children lest they lose heart." He especially says this to fathers because they would be the

more heavy hand, I suppose sometimes, and so he mentions particularly fathers here. In other words, don't be so pressuring, don't be haranguing and hammering and so on, and hounding your children so much that they feel, "There's nothing I can do to please him," and they just lose heart. They become spiritless. They become listless. They give up. Don't do that. So there's a balancing there of that sort of thing.

You probably see this in modern dress, maybe at a fifth grade football game on a Saturday morning somewhere and here's a poor fifth grader that happened to fumble the ball and he was tackled and the other team got it and he comes off the field and his dad goes down there and he chews him up one side and down the other etc. and you look at that and you say, "I wonder which one of them really has the problem." That sort of thing, that constant pressuring and so on. I know people who have had parents like that and it leaves its mark but we have to be aware of this too with just our children generally perhaps in the whole matter of education, don't we? And we have to stay on them because sometimes our kids don't have much motivation to keep up on, say, their academic work. Sometimes you have to push them. Some are self-motivated, some you have to stay with them, you have to light a fire under them, you have to keep pressure on them or they just won't do their work. That's it.

So there's a place for that sort of thing but sometimes you have to watch it because you may come to the realization that, "You know, I may push my kid, I may encourage him, I may try to get him to do or her to do what they are capable of doing," but then you'll find out that what they're capable of doing is that they'll be a B- student and that's okay. They don't have to go to the university. There is nothing wrong with going into heating and air conditioning training etc. etc. But you have to watch that you don't pressure them wrongly for something that maybe they can't do and it's not within their capability in that area. I'm still waiting for the parent who has the courage, I've seen a lot of bumper stickers about honor students, but I would love to see a parent who is together enough to have a bumper sticker that says something like, "My child is a C student at Salem Middle School," and that can be okay sometimes if that's the best the student can do.

So this hammering away, this balance with the family, but then he goes onto another one and that's the workplace relation and that's in the first century slaves and masters and so on. I'm not going to deal a whole lot, I know it has carryover to employment etc. I'm not going to deal a lot with that but, again, you notice the address. Verse 22, "Slaves, obey in all things your masters on the human level," etc. He assumes that slaves are accountable and that they are rational and that they are moral beings. He addresses it. Just sometimes the assumptions Scripture makes are as revealing as anything else. Slaves, he assumes that they're accountable and responsible and he addresses them. What a wonderful thing.

Now, notice that in his address and what it assumes but notice the space that's given. Four verses are given to the slaves here. Now, there are probably several reasons for that but one certainly probably is there were a good number of slaves in the early church and in a church fellowship and so it was proper to give them direction in terms of the Christian life and their responsibilities. Now, I think you need to be careful that you not read 18th and 19th century slave conditions as we know it in the states or in Great Britain etc. or

other places, back into the New Testament period. That's not denying that in the New Testament period slavery could be cruel, slavery could be brutal and so on, but you must not read back all those conditions and assume that it was only that. To whom is Paul talking here when he addresses slaves? He's talking to medical doctors. He's talking to beauticians. He's talking to government employees. He's talking to teachers and sanitation workers and to estate administrators and to accountants and so on. There were slaves in the first century that had positions of great responsibility and respect and so on, but they were technically slaves.

They had a whole new world, in a way, because, well, there is a new motivation. Verse 22, you work not just to meet the eye of the master and please him in an external way "but with singleness of heart, fearing the Lord." The Lord there means the Lord Jesus, fear the Lord. What drives you? What motivates you? Well, it's reverence for Christ and representing him.

And then you notice that there is a new manner in your work or should be. Verse 23, "Whatever you do, work with gusto." It's literally "from the soul, from your innards." It would be like "work with gusto, as to the Lord and not to men." There was a difference in the manner of your work.

And then there's an incentive, there's a future reward, isn't there? Verse 24, "knowing that it's from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance." What's the inheritance? Well, probably basically resurrection life and life in the kingdom of God. But it's interesting, isn't it, that he talks to slaves and he talks about an inheritance? An inheritance is what a son gets but Paul is talking about the slaves, Christian slaves, they have an inheritance. It's almost like thinking of a dog that has an IRA or something like that. It just kind of jars you a little bit.

Then he says but you also have an accountability, verse 25, "the one who does wrong will receive the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality." He says, "You're accountable. You're accountable to live responsibly as being in a position of a slave to represent Jesus well and to fulfill these demands and so on. If you don't, if you do wrong etc. and you wrong your master, you receive back, you're under the judgment of Christ too. There is no victimhood exemption just because you're a slave."

Then he goes ahead and he says the same thing for masters in a way. "You masters," 4:1, "give to your slaves what is right and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." You know, you may have slaves, you Christian masters, but you need to realize that you're Christ's slave and you're accountable to him and you need to give your slaves what is right and fair. Why did he say that? Well, maybe because wealthy people and masters and that sort of thing, were tightwads sometimes. The wealthy in the New Testament period and so on and in the area of Greece and Asia, seemed to be very willing to donate to, let's say public works projects. That was good because that, people recognized that; their name was associated with that. It's good to be generous there. Or if there was a disaster and there was needed to be disaster relief, why, the wealthy were very willing to donate there because, once again, they got credit. But just paying the

wages of their people that worked for them didn't really turn them on all that much and so Paul says, "You make sure you pay what is right and fair. You have a responsibility for paying an adequate wage."

So all of these things come down and you might say, "Well, as you look at doing all in the name of Christ in your relations, so why is this important as you come to the end of these relations? Why does this matter? Why is it important?" Well, you have to go back, don't you, to Colossians 1:18 where Paul said that the purpose of all these things, he highlighted the theme of Colossians, the supremacy of Christ in all things, and you remember how he put the purpose that was essential. Chapter 1, verse 18: in order that in all things he alone may come to have first place. In all things. And what this passage is saying is that the nuts and bolts of the Christian life are part of the "all things" over which Jesus and in which Jesus has to have first place. He has to make a difference in the nuts and bolts of life.

Maybe I told you once before, Charles Spurgeon, a 19th century Baptist preacher, was interviewing a young lady who wanted to become a member of the church. She was a domestic servant and so on. He got her story of how she came to know Christ and how Christ drew her to himself. He got a little information on her knowledge about the word of God and he said, "Well now, all that's very good but what real evidence do you have that you've been converted?" And she blushed and then she said, "Well, I sweep under the mats now." Yeah, that's it. That may not seem like a very big deal, that's just one of those nuts and bolts, isn't it? But Jesus had made a difference in her housekeeping. It had transformed that. Jesus has a way of getting under the mats and when Jesus has first place, it shows up in the nuts and the bolts of life.

Now Paul says, secondly, that when you do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, you have to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus in your devotions. That's chapter 4, verses 2 to 4. Now, I'm just going to deal with one matter here and I want you to notice the way it begins in verse 2, "Devote yourselves to prayer." Devote yourselves to prayer and "to prayer" is emphatic in the Greek text. It's as if, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping awake in it with thanksgiving," and he goes on to solicit their prayers and so on which I won't be able to deal with tonight.

Well, why does Paul go into this stress on prayer? Because it's just another topic perhaps that he's supposed to deal with. I don't think that's it. Think of the context. You've just come through these various relations and so on, they're not exhaustive but they're at least suggestive. You've got marriage, you've got family, you've got work and so on and you've just come through that and you realize what's demanded of you in those arenas and so on and then Paul says, "Devote yourselves to prayer." Doesn't it strike you that that's perfectly appropriate? Doesn't it strike you that you have to ask yourselves as you're looking at chapter 3, verse 18, through chapter 4, verse 1, "Well, how can I handle these responsibilities? How can I live up to these demands? How can I really be consistent in these requirements of me in the daily routine of the Christian life?" And doesn't it mean that I have to say I'm desperate and I can only give myself to prayer about these matters? Doesn't it mean that marriage retreats and parenting seminars are okay as far as they go,

but there is far more help than that that is needed and when I realize what's required of me in fleshing out the Christian life in the name of Jesus and to the glory of my Savior, I have to say, "I need help desperately! I have to give myself to prayer in regard to those things!" I need to grab hold of the hand of Jesus' garment and beg him for the grace in order to live in the nuts and bolts of the Christian life. "Devote yourselves to prayer."

And thirdly, he says, "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus in your witness." In your witness, chapter 4, verses 5 and 6. You notice the focus that he gives there, he says, "keep walking in wisdom toward those on the outside." Now, those are pagans, those who are not Christians and so on. "Snapping up the opportunity." Well, what opportunity might that be? Well, he mentions then in verse 6, "Your speech must always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to give an answer to each one." So it's talking about your relationships to pagans, those who don't share your faith, and don't look on them as a hurdle, don't look on them as a hindrance, don't look on them as a frustration, nothing like that, but snap up the opportunity that they may give you.

Now, Dick Lucas makes a helpful point, I think. He says in verses 5 and 6, what you have is basically response of evangelism. In verses 3 and 4, you have Paul talking and asking prayers for his direct evangelism. Whether he's witnessing to a Roman soldier that's chained to him or whether he becomes free at large and can preach the word in other fields of labor, that's direct evangelism that Paul would be involved in. But Dick Lucas says in verses 5 and 6 you have what every Christian needs, you can have responsive evangelism. Well, they are just opportunities that come to you. You don't have to concoct them. You don't have to try to worm your way into them. It's just something that comes as presented to you and you snap up the opportunity.

And you do it with speech that is both gracious and seasoned with salt. Now, what does that mean? Let me just quote, I don't like to read stuff but let me just quote for you what one New Testament scholar says about this phrase. He says, "A discussion 'seasoned with salt' became a way of referring to an interesting stimulating and enjoyable conversation or discourse. One ancient writer bemoaned the presentation of certain philosophers as unsalted." So an interesting, enjoyable, stimulating kind of conversation. Your speech should be both gracious and gripping. That kind of thing.

And you need to know how you're to answer each one. Do we have opportunities like that sometimes? They come to us, don't they? Helmut Thielicke, the German theologian and preacher of the 20th century told about a time, I suppose this may have been in the 1960s, I'm not sure, but a time I think he was in Hamburg, Germany and he was probably a university professor and he's also quite a renowned preacher, but he said: we were at this occasion in a posh hotel. It was an upper snooty kind of situation. It was the christening of a ship and people had their champagne glasses and they were dressed in tails and it was a regal sort of affair. And he happened to see the famous owner of a ship that was coming to him, and he began to speak to Thielicke about the death of his wife; he began to speak to him in front of other people in this little circle and so on. And Thielicke said that his wife was sad that her husband didn't share her faith. They had a close relationship but he didn't share her Christian faith and that was a sadness to her. But then the fellow as

he was telling Thielicke about the death of his wife, went on to say this, "When she died," he said, "one of her last statements had been, 'If you know what it meant to have a Savior on one's last journey, then you too would make this journey.' Can you imagine what she meant by that?"

Now, it's a little bit, if you knew what it meant to have a Savior on one's last journey, then you too would make this journey, and he can't figure it out, but what a gift for Helmut Thielicke to launch into the Gospel. Sometimes it's just placed before you and you snap up the opportunity and sometimes all it takes is nothing quite so involved but sometimes it's just a matter of sheer attentiveness.

What do I mean by that? Let me just pull it together this way. I told you before about a fellow by the name of William Thomas. It was in Martyn Lloyd Jones congregation in South Wales and how he was converted and so on and some of the problems he had. But William Thomas was in the community there in South Wales and he was basically a nasty profane drunk. He had a pony and a cart and he did a little trading and so on but at the end of the day, he might be stone drunk out in his cart and the pony would just naturally take him home. He was so nasty that people in the pub, other fellows who were drinking beer etc., didn't want to even drink with him so he was by himself and so on a lot.

He was in the pub one day and he heard somebody else at the next table, a couple of fellows, saying that they had been to a certain chapel, that they heard the preacher there say something like there was hope for everybody, that no one was without hope and so on. Well, this kind of sprung his curiosity and he decided that he would go to that chapel and hear that preacher. Well, he went to the chapel where Lloyd Jones preached on a Sunday evening and when he got there, he lost his nerve and he was standing there by the gate and so on and he just lost his nerve and he went back home. The next Sunday night came up and he went and lo and behold he heard singing and he knew for whatever reason he was late and so he went back home with his heart in his boots. The third Sunday night he came and there he was dithering around there nervously at the gate wondering what to do and so on and hesitating and one of the men there said, "Are you coming in, Bill? Come and sit with me." And he went in. It was that night he was converted to Christ, 70 years old, more or less, and he was brought to the Savior but it wasn't any great thing, it was just snapping up an opportunity because there was a little attentiveness given. "Are you coming in, Bill? Come and sit with me." Blessings on the head of that man who noticed him. Everything hinged on that. Do all in the name of Christ in your witness.

So, chapter 3, verse 17, is not a throw-away line but it's the controlling concept for living the Christian life in all its details, and if you wonder what chapter 3, verse 17, involves, you just read chapter 3, verse 18, through chapter 4, verse 6, and you'll find that the Christian life is very nutty and bolty.

Let us pray.

Now, our Father, we are told in the saying that goes around that the devil is in the details but we pray, O Lord, that Christ Jesus would be in the details of the nuts and bolts of our lives, of our Christian lives. We pray that in all things he would have first place and that even in the nuts and bolts, he especially would have first place. Amen.