

16. Relationships Matter

Today is Father's Day!

Why is it that in most Mother's Day sermons we lift up mom and talk about how wonderful she is ... but in most Father's Day sermons the theme is "Dad you're dropping the ball, here is what you need to do better?"

Today, instead of talking specifically about Father's I want to talk about relationships in general ... and how our relationship with Christ affects all other relationships.

¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

²⁰ Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

²² Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (Col. 3:18-25)

In this text Paul speaks to wives, husbands, children, fathers, and slaves.

And, I want to give you three wonderful truths that rise up out of this verse ...

... However, I want to first deal with the "controversial" elements of this text.

... Yesterday Justin said, "Now be careful with this scripture, if you mess up it is going to get you into a lot of trouble."

... But let's be honest ...

... anytime you stand with the truth it always gets you into trouble.

And that's because the truth of God's Word runs counter to our sinful nature and selfish desires.

That brings us to the first the word "subject" (*hypotassesthe*) ... "Wives be subject to your husbands."

... some versions translate this word "submit."

In both cases (because we speak English) we read cultural meanings into these words ...

The actual Greek word carried both a military and no military meaning.

In the military sense this word meant to arrange forces under the guidance of a singular leader

In the non-military sense it referred to a voluntary attitude of cooperating with and assuming the responsibility to follow.

... in reality a better word would be honor. "Wives honor your husbands."

We live in an **egalitarian** age.

... and the assumptions of this philosophy are so strong that it is difficult for people to think objectively outside this system in our culture.

The idea of a wife giving honor to her husband is foreign to our ideas of individual sovereignty

... it is saying I trust my life, my direction, my earthly destiny to my husband.

Next we see in verse 22 that culturally insensitive word "Slaves."

As with the word "subject" we read our contemporary understandings back into the word.

... when we hear the word "slave" we think of the slavery that was in America 150 years ago.

That is not what slavery was in the ancient Greek and Roman world.

In that world slaves (or bondservants) were considered part of a person's household.

... and although they did not enjoy the same level of freedom as the master they did enjoy the same level of respect and prestige as his household.

Of course, the modern man would argue "unless you are totally free, you are not free at all."

... but that is not what Paul teaches.

Paul wants us to know that spiritual freedom is more important than political freedom.

Paul says that even if you don't have political liberty, you can have liberty in Christ ...

... it is possible to be limited by society and still have character and be a person of integrity.

So, Paul tells these "bond-servants" to obey their masters ...

... not just because it is right ... but Paul wants them to obey from the heart

Can you see how contrary this is to our modern culture.

There is no protest march ... no political activism.

Rather than teaching Christian slaves to rebel, Paul instructed them to obey from the heart for the glory of God.

It was never God's plan to change the world through politics ...

... God's plan has always been to change the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ!

As hearts are changed, society changes.

And we know that has been the case...

... it was Christians that started hospitals and orphanages

... The name William Wilberforce is synonymous with the abolition of slavery...

In 1784 his life was changed radically.

On a trip to Europe while spending time with one of his former schoolteachers he read William Law's book A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.

That book touched him profoundly and he found himself being drawn to Christ

... this led him to ask himself whether or not one could serve both Jesus Christ and one's own nation in the field of politics?'

...He wondered if these two goals were mutually exclusive.

He had a discussion John Newton, the hymn writer who wrote Amazing Grace and a former slave ship captain.

In fact, they met in secret because the political establishment frowned on evangelical Christians...

The strain of this internal struggle showed on the face of young William Wilberforce.

During their clandestine meeting, he told Newton that he had heard him preach when he was just a boy, but he "was afraid to surrender to Christ for fear of what others might say."

"And now?" asked Newton quietly.

"Now I have come to a crisis of my soul, I am afraid of turning my back on Christ. But I also fear losing face and prestige. If my constituents were to hear that I embraced ... Christianity, my career would be over."

Wilberforce paused and shifted in his seat, then gave Newton a determined half-smile.

"But maybe that would not be so bad.

You have always inspired me, Reverend Newton. When I used to go to Olney and hear your sermons, I felt like jumping up and asking you to help me be a preacher like you.

But when I returned to London that enthusiasm cooled, and I eventually got into politics.

Still, as I read the Bible and Christian books, I am convinced that I must act on what I have read. I've come to see you about this before I go out of my mind."

For the next few hours, Reverend John Newton explained the way of the Cross and total surrender to Christ.

William Wilberforce wept and gave his life to Christ. Now he was ready to follow Newton into the ministry and face the consequences.

But Newton wisely counseled against it: "If God can use an ex-slave trader for His work, imagine what He can do through a gifted member of Parliament.

... There's nothing in the Bible that says you cannot be both a Christian and a statesman. True, these two seldom are found in one person, but it happens."

Wilberforce accepted this advice and decided to remain where he was and serve God.

He turned his considerable energy toward abolishing the slave trade ... something he considered to be a blight on the soul of the British Empire.

In 1788, after a stirring three-and-a-half hour speech on the subject, Wilberforce made his first motion to abolish the slave trade.

His impassioned speech had such an impact on the other members of Parliament that the local papers predicted sure passage of the Bill. "The House of Commons on Tuesday was crowded with Liverpool merchants who hung their heads in sorrow, for the African occupation of bolts and chains is no more," predicted the London paper.

The prediction, however, was premature.

After delay tactics and other political maneuvering by his opponents, Wilberforce lost the first of many votes on this crucial issue.

In fact, every single year, for the next seventeen years, his motion would be defeated.

In 1806, after eighteen years of hard work, Wilberforce finally heard the “sweet sound” he had longed for.

After they counted votes on his motion to abolish the slave trade, the ranking member of Parliament said very simply, “The ayes have it!” Wilberforce had won.

... But he wasn't satisfied.

Wilberforce continued to work tirelessly against the entire institution of slavery and eventually, just four days before his death in 1833, Parliament passed a vote to abolish slavery in all the British territories.

Wilberforce the Christian had remained Wilberforce the member of Parliament. And God had used him mightily.

Certainly, in 1 Timothy 1:10 God condemns enslaving and selling someone ...

But, God has not called us to political activism.

Even when Jesus heals the centurion's slave recorded in Matt 8 and Luke 7 ... Jesus heals him and says nothing about letting the slave go free.

In fact, the only place you find civil disobedience in scripture is when God's people, by law, are **compelled to do something in disobedience to God's law.**

Daniel and the 3 Hebrew children did not escape from captivity in Babylon and start an underground railroad ...

... but they would not bow to Nebuchadnezzar's Image

Peter refused to stop preaching, but he **calmly went to prison when they arrested him** for it.

Mary and Joseph went to register and pay their taxes ... but they did not return to Herod and tell him anything.

The ONLY time you find civil disobedience in scripture is when government imposed something that was contrary to God's laws.

So don't get "off focus" this morning because you see the word "slaves."

The over-arching emphasis of these 2 paragraphs is relationships.

Paul wants us to see that Christ changes our relationships

1. Christ is to be Lord of all our Relationships

Look at how many times Paul mentions the *Lord* an astounding 7 times!

¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. ²⁰ Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. ²² Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth

- **Wives honor**—because husband need it
- **Husband's love**—because wives need it
- **Children obey**—this is how you learn to be an adult
- **Fathers don't exasperate**—children's first understanding of God is through their relationship with their earthly father.
- **Slaves obey from your heart**—how many slaves (because of their obedience) led their masters to God?
 - Joseph led Potiphar
 - Servant girl led Naaman
 - Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar

To become a Christians means to take on a whole new identity and this new identity affects every aspect of our lives.

... you see that's one of the problems

... there are a whole lot of people who bear the name “Christian” but nothing in their life has changed.

Paul says **that’s not how this works!**

Grace changes lives!

... it changes who we are and how we treat one another.

Not just at church, not just in the community of faith or even at work ... but also at home.

We treat each other in the way Christ has commands us ...

Christ must be lord in all our relationships.

2. Loving Christ comes before all other loves.

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

I noted in the last point that the word “Lord” is found 7 times

... notice these phrases:

- *as is fitting in the Lord.*
- *this is well-pleasing to the Lord*
- *as for the Lord*
- *that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.*
- *It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.*

Most of us would rank healthy relationships as one of the most important things in life.

... it is only second to having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Even if your health isn’t the best, if you have loving relationships, you can enjoy life.

A poor man with a loving family and good friends is far richer than a rich man who is alone.

A Jewish religious expert asked Jesus (Matt. 22:36), “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied (Matt. 22:37-40):

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend on the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Please take note of the order...

First you must love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind... that is the first a greatest commandment.

... The primary reason wives should honor their husbands, husbands love their wives, children obey their parents, and slaves obey their masters ... is because this is what pleases Christ.

... but the only way these things are possible are if you put your love for Christ first.

3. If you love Christ first, you will love others correctly.

I want you to notice how Paul addresses this text.

He doesn't say husbands your wives should honor you ...

... No, Paul speaks to each person directly telling them how their actions are to be towards others.

People in healthy relationships aren't concerned about what others are supposed to be doing ... in healthy relationship the person is concerned about what they should be doing in regard to others.

In all our relationships, we are called to display the love of Christ towards others through our obedience to the commands of scripture.

Our relationship with Christ determines all other (past, present, and future) relationships.

... this is why Paul writes:

25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (Col. 3:25)

Here is what Paul is saying ...

Your relationship with Jesus Christ comes first and that relationship determines the quality and manner of all earthly relationships ... and here is why this is important.

Our relationships tell us **who** we are, **whose** we are and **what** can be expected of us.

Our relationships define and mold us.

- In Genesis 6, Noah was defined by who he wasn't. (He found favor ...)
- In 2nd Samuel 13:3 Amnon was defined by his "friend" named Jonadab
- In John 18, Peter was defined by who he followed.

If we're honest with ourselves, we'll see those relationships we have define us more than we would like to admit.

... and our closest relationships define us most.