



SCRIPTURE:

Colossians 3:18-4:1

RECAP:

One of the things that can be said of God is that He is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33). He has an ordering of things that permeates all of His creation. The universe is ordered in meticulous ways (galaxies, planet rotation, proximity to the sun, tilt of the earth, et.). The systems of Earth are ordered, structured, and complex. This includes the human body. No matter where you look in God's creation you find ordered, structured purpose and design. This is why science is even possible. Science looks at order and structure to understand the things that are made. If things didn't act consistently, then science wouldn't be able to function.

Every aspect of life is supposed to be marked by this order, including human relationships. And there are all types of human relationships. These are not left without a design or purpose for their ordering and structure. But sin has brought chaos instead of order. Sin has brought the overthrow of God's design and an assault against properly ordered relationships. Everyone seeks to impose his or her own ideas, and ignores what God says will bring flourishing in these relationships.

You've heard people quip to others, "Know your role!" This is usually said sarcastically or aggressively to someone who is getting outside their lane of responsibility or stepping into someone else's turf. It's usually seen as a negative to be told, "Know your role!" But the truth is, we DO need to know our role. We need to understand what God expects of us, and how we can honor Him as we live out those roles.

The name of our message this morning is: Know Your Role. Following Jesus radically reorients our entire lives on what he says. We no longer get to call the shots. We submit ourselves to His Word and His ordering of our lives, including our relationships.

Exegesis of Colossians 3:18-4:1

Paul's letter is front heavy with doctrine and back heavy with practice. This is his typical way of writing to churches. He wants to establish them in right doctrine, which anchors and roots the practices. In the last several sermons we've looked at the pursuit of holiness and obedience. We've heard Paul talk about what should be taken off in our lives (sins to turn from). And he's talked about what to put on (virtues and fruits to cultivate). In our passage today, the theme is the proper ordering and function of relationships. And you'll see, Christians have all sorts of relationships in our lives. We have voluntary relationships (marriages, churches, other organizations, etc.), then we have involuntary (parents, boss, government, etc.). These relationships have hierarchy and order in them.

Now before I go any further, it is important that you understand that word hierarchy is not a negative word. It is a descriptive word. The reason it is perceived as negative is because of the relationship our culture (and our hearts) have with authority. God creates hierarchies. He created hierarchy within the animal kingdom. He created hierarchy with humans as image bearers and set them apart from the rest of creation. But he also created hierarchies in relationships.

Hierarchies are not bad. The key is to understand that hierarchies are inevitable, no matter how much you try to remove them. And you need to recognize that God created hierarchies within relationships for a purpose, and each person in the relationship has a role. And God's commands in these things are not arbitrary but anchored to His character.

I. Husbands and wives (3:18-19)

Both husbands and wives get one verse here. But Paul writes about this in other letters too. There is an ordering of the marriage relationship that is in alignment with God's design. He instructs wives to submit to their husbands. Submission is not a negative word, despite how our culture reacts to it. One person submitting to another person is not a statement of one person's worth in comparison to another. It's not a statement about talent, ability, worth, value, or any other number of things. It's simply an ordering of the relationship.

For example: a big name wide-receiver who makes millions of dollars and stars in commercials will submit to his wide receiver coach who makes less money than him and nobody knows the name of. Why? Because that's the proper order of the relationship,

and if it gets disordered, it can cause a problem on the team. In fact, we see this in cases when players essentially don't submit to the coach and the coach loses all authority, stripped of the capacity to do his job.

Wives are to submit to their husbands. This is fitting in the Lord. It's suitable, proper for those in Christ. This is the expectation. This is the order. Husbands are to love their wives, and do not be harsh with them. They are not to abuse their role as final authority in the home. They are not to abuse their strength and use it against their wives, rather, they are to use their strength to fulfill their role: provide, protect, and lead their wives.

This is why Peter says (1 Peter 3:7) that husbands are supposed to live with their wives in an understanding way, recognizing them as the weaker vessel. This isn't a cut down or a slam against women. Women are physically weaker (as a whole). Men are created physically stronger. These are not evolutionary features or design defects, these are purposeful realities dictated by God. For what reason? Because God gave us bodies that would help us fulfill our roles and responsibilities within these relationships. The warning from Peter to men is that if they do not live with their wives in this kind of understanding way, their prayers will be hindered. Think about that: God will interrupt His relationship with the man if the man does not live in proper relationship with his wife. Why? Because as Peter says, they are both fellow heirs of grace. They are equals in Christ, but God has ordered the home with this hierarchy of responsibility and authority.

Any negative reactions we have to Colossians 3 or 1 Peter 3 are indicators of how influenced and shaped by the culture we've become. It shows you how out of fashion and out of step God's prescribed ordering of the marriage relationship is with our culture. But as Christians, we don't care what's out of step. We care about being obedient to God. We live in a world that wants women to act more like men and men to act more like women. We want strong women, and weak men. All of this is in service to undercutting God's design for how these relationships flourish.

Notice, he doesn't say "women submit to men." That isn't ever stated in the Bible. It is about a wife and a husband. Does wives submitting to their husbands mean women never have a say so in the home? By no means. It means at the end of the day, there can never be two final authorities or leaders. Someone has to call the shot. Someone has to make decisions, and God has given that role to the husband. He holds the husband responsible and accountable (hence, in the Garden, "what have you done" was said to Adam, not Eve).

II. Parents and children (3:20-21)

Paul then moves to the relationship between children and parents. Again, there is hierarchy and authority. Children are to obey their parents in everything. This pleases the Lord. God is pleased when children obey their parents. Now, when Paul says everything, he uses the word in the proper sense of what is right. He doesn't expect parents to ask their children to deny God and for the child to do so because Scripture says "in everything." Right? "Everything" here refers to everything that is appropriate for the parent to command and ask of their child. Likewise, the parents, particularly the father, are not to provoke their children, causing them to be discouraged. This prohibition here not to "provoke" or "exasperate" your children is emphasizing overly finding fault. To constantly nit-pick or be harsh to them will discourage them. And this can do irreparable damage. The role of the parent is to build up their child and develop them as God-fearing adults, sometimes that means through discipline, but it can't mean ONLY through discipline.

III. Masters and servants (3:22-4:1)

These final verses emphasize the role of master and servants that were common in household settings. But it can also be applied in general work settings. There is always going to be a boss and a worker. There is always a manager or leader and the employees. Each has a responsibility within the roles God has placed them in. Servants are to obey the masters in everything (same as with children, so long as it doesn't require sin against God or others). They are not to do this begrudgingly or only when the master is watching them. This is people pleasing; it's not sincere. All work is to be done sincerely as if done for the Lord himself. Remember that work honors God, and is considered good. Work is not a part of the fall. We should do our work with excellence, doing it in such a way as to honor God. The Lord rewards and honors this. Likewise, God punishes not fulfilling our roles.

Masters are reminded that they are to treat their slaves, or bondservants, justly and fairly. Based on what? Knowing that they too have a master (God Himself). If they are unjust to those they are over, they need to know the One over them may choose to be harsh to them. Why? Because they are abusing their responsibility and authority.

That's all the ground Paul covers in this particular passage. But since we're on the topic I'm going to expand two more points that Paul and the New Testament talks about in other places. Again, to demonstrate how essential it is to recognize God's view on the nature of relationships and the proper ordering of them.

IV. Government and citizens

Government is not a result of the fall or a product of fallen nature. Government exists to promote justice and the common good. Government is instituted by God, and people in government have responsibilities and so do citizens. At some point, I may do an extended teaching on this because I believe most people today, including Christians, do not understand what the Bible teaches on this.

Romans 13:1-7. Romans 13 tells us to obey and submit to our government leaders. This is absolutely right. They are the Lord's servants, or ministers, and they wield the sword. They are supposed to be agents of justice. They are instituted by God. So watch this: government officials have a role and responsibility to fulfill their God-given roles and citizens must fulfill their God-given roles. When both happen, we have just societies that flourish.

However, there is a time, even for Christians, for civil disobedience. Meaning, we don't obey officials on particular regulations or judgments they layout. That is not a willy nilly decision. This is based on whether these government officials have commanded things that go against God's Word. Christians are to submit to the highest government first, God. And we cannot obey government officials that cause us to disobey God.

V. Church leaders and members

The church has structure and order to it. The Lord lays out the order of His body to be led by qualified elders who lead over the members of the body. The members are not called that because of country-clubs or gym "memberships" but in connection to 1 Corinthians 12 reference to each person in the church as "members" of the body. We are interconnected pieces, each with different gifts and roles, each connected through covenant commitment to the Lord and one another. I've done entire sermons on this before, but needless to say for now, it is important to recognize that the church has a God-given ordering that leads to its flourishing when properly followed. A big part of the problems we have in the church in our country today is that this is often not followed properly (whether in the structure itself, or in the qualifications of leaders being met, or in the expectations of members followed-through on and accountability given).

Notice that there are not many scenarios in your life where you are not in some sort of hierarchical relationship that comes with expectations from God on how you conduct yourself since you are a Christian.

Application/Take-aways:

1. Listen to God's Word on hierarchies over the world.

God's Word is not silent on the expectations of how to order society and our relationships. God has expectations that accord with His will. As believers, we have to listen to what God says about these things over what the world says about these things. Any hesitations or resistance we find in ourselves is evident of both our rebellious nature, and of our culture's headway in shaping our thinking. This is why we cannot be conformed to the world, but are called to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

2. Submit to and fulfill your God-given obligations in these relationships.

We must recognize we each have different roles and responsibilities depending on what environment and relationship we are in. What God expects of us is to 1. know what He says about those, and 2. to fulfill them with a willing heart to honor Him.

3. Confess and repent of any rebellion or laziness you discover in your heart toward these.

As sinful creatures, we are going to do two things: 1. fail, and 2. fail big. We will rebel against our roles of submitting and leading. We will be slow to obey or quick to abuse. We will neglect responsibilities and choose passivity. Regardless of where we fall short, we should (as in all things) confess it to the Lord, that we fell short of His standard and our responsibilities, and repent (turn toward obedience to His designs). Remember that there is forgiveness through Christ, and power through the Holy Spirit.

4. Imitate Jesus' obedience in fulfilling his role.

Jesus' example of submitting to his role is one that is fascinating and helpful to us. Every time we think we are above submitting to the proper ordering of things we can look at Jesus and see his willingness to do so, despite his exalted status above all things. This is God in the flesh. This is the Creator of all things (as Paul has outlined in Colossians already).

Notice when he goes to be baptized and John the Baptist says, "You should be the one baptizing me." But what was Jesus' response to him? We must do this to fulfill all things. In other words, this is the proper order. This is the proper way.

Or remember when Jesus stood before Pilate and Pilate was asking him all sorts of questions and Jesus wasn't saying anything. Pilate asks Jesus why he doesn't say

anything, doesn't he realize the authority Pilate has over him, to set him free or sentence him to death? How does Jesus respond? He only has power because God had given him that power, and if he wanted, Jesus could have summoned fire from Heaven on Pilate's head. But he didn't. This is why he was there. He was going to be sentenced to death, though innocent. He was going to go to the cross and atone for sins he never committed. This was the proper ordering of things.

As Christians, we follow the Savior who died for us and rose from the dead. He is the majestic Savior and Lord of the Universe, yet submitted himself and subjected himself to the proper order of things. So as Christians, who recognize we are not the Savior and Lord of the Universe, we have no qualms with submitting to our proper roles and expectations God has of us. We look to the Savior, and we follow his example. And since He has made us new, we prioritize our lives on what His Word instructs us to do. And we do it joyfully.

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What does the way God created everything (order/structure) tell us about Him?
- 2) Why do we view hierarchies as bad? What does this tell us about how we relate to God?
- 3) Why does Paul start this section off with the husband and wife relationship?
- 4) Why does Paul mention that fathers shouldn't provoke their children to anger after defining the authority of parents?
- 5) What are the things you like the least about your work? Why do you think that is?
- 6) Do you struggle with submitting to the government even if what they are regulating is not going against God? Why or why not?
- 7) Why is it important for the church members to submit to the church leaders?
- 8) How does submitting to God help us submit in all other relationships and vice versa?
- 9) Where do you struggle with submission?