

Divide-The-Truth Sunday School Preview Notes
Colossians 3:18-4:18
Explore the Bible Sunday School Lesson for November 30, 2003

Introduction: We now come to our last Sunday School lesson in the book of Colossians. In most modern translations, the number 18 is highlighted. This indicates a new paragraph in the original language. We must remember that the original language of the New Testament was Greek. Also it helps to understand that there were no verse or chapter breaks in the original manuscripts. They were inserted hundreds of years later by those translating the Scriptures into Latin. Verses and chapters were put there for the benefit of the reader. I am thankful for them.

Although verse eighteen begins a new paragraph, it cannot be divorced from what Paul has just stated. In fact, last week I stated that it was a summary for what he has said, and it is an opening for what he will say in the next verses. The general principle of *“whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord”* is now practically applied in the relationship between husband and wife (vv.18-19), parents and children (v.20-21), and servants and masters (v.22), or in our case we will make the application as employee and employer.

Second, as we read verses eighteen to verse one of chapter four we must understand that the whole passage is speaking of duties, not rights. The rights to be sure are clearly implied, but the stress does not fall on them. Third, the duties are reciprocal. In other words, they are not one sided. Fourth, I encourage you to read Ephesians 5:22-33 as this passage is very similar. The biggest difference between the passages is Paul’s beautiful statement about marriage and about the church as the bride of Christ.

18 *“Wives submit to your husbands.”* In a world that challenges authority and resists boundaries, this passage, though straightforward and very clear, has been widely challenged in our day by the world and by our very denomination. In June of 2000 our convention revised and adopted a new resolution regarding the family in our Baptist Faith and Message. It was and continues to be a source of contention among many in our denomination. There were several reasons for this revision, but the main reason was because the family is under attack. Homosexuality, couples living out of wedlock, adoption of children by individuals who are openly gay, divorce, and simply the choice to have children outside the bounds of marriage are just a few examples are how God’s choice and command that one man and one woman remain married until death have threatened and eroded the family.

I have included the exact wording of this revised resolution in my notes so that you may see what it says.

XVIII. The Family

The Baptist Faith and Message: A Statement Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention June 14, 2000

“God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God’s unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God’s image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents."

The first duty that Paul instructs the wife to do is to "submit" to her husbands. The word "submit" means to place one's self under the authority of another or to be loyal, not by compulsion but by willingness. The exact same term is used in describing our Lord's submission to His parents in Luke 2:51 and our submission to governing authorities in Romans 8:7. Notice that the command is given to wives to submit to their "own husbands." Though respect towards one another is expected, submission of wives to men is only commanded to the one in which they are married to. In other words, my wife is to willingly submit to my authority but not to the authority of another man.

What causes so many people to have a problem with this text is that they fail to understand the attitude in which the passage is written. We will see this more so as we get to the next verse, but for now we must understand that this verse cannot be interpreted that the husband is to be the dictator ruling his family with a rod of iron. The wife is the husband's helpmate not his slave. Verse nineteen will certainly point this out.

I have already mentioned the attitude in which this passage is to be interpreted. Attitude is everything in regards to how we live our lives. Paul, in the second half of this verse, will speak of the attitude of the wife as he will speak to the attitude of the husband in the next verse when he states, "as it is fit in the Lord." The word "fit" means proper. "In the Lord" is how God has designed the family. It is how God naturally and spiritually desires that the family be run. Thus, wives submitting to their husbands and in the next verse, husbands loving their wives is more than a matter of physical love, but is raised to a spiritual dimension.

19 Just as wives are to submit to their own husbands, husbands are to love their own wives. John Phillips states that "the instructions for the wife are addressed to her will; the instructions to the husband are addressed to his heart."

The word "love" used by Paul is the Greek word "agapate" which is a form of the Greek word "agape." The word used here by Paul does not refer to affection or romantic attraction but rather speaks of a caring, sacrificial, selfless type of love. It is a love that is caught up in fulfilling the needs of someone else rather than self. It is the highest form of love, the very love that God revealed towards us by providing His Son to die upon a Roman cross and pay the wages of sin. It is Calvary's love.

The second command given to men is "be not bitter against them (wives)." The command is an imperative, which can be interpreted "do not have the habit of being bitter." The word "bitter" means harsh as the NIV interprets it. Thus, Paul is instructing the husband not to have a harsh attitude or a resentful attitude toward his wife. The apostle Peter adds, "ye, husbands, dwell with them (your wife) according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). In I Corinthians 7:33-34 Paul calls on both the husband and the wife to have concern for one another. Though there is submission and authority, it is balanced by love, and there is spiritual equality and a desire to please one another.

How could a wife not desire to submit to her husband if her husband loved her as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25)? How could a husband not love his wife if she willingly submitted to his authority?

20 Paul now moves right on down the line to the most natural stopping place, children. His instructions to them are "obey your parents in all things." This text is also noted in Ephesians 6:1. Why would Paul first address the parents before addressing the children? Because, as I have already said, it is the next natural stop, but also because one will not likely occur without the other. In other words, children are more likely to obey their parents if parents are demonstrating verses eighteen and nineteen in the home. The word "children" is the Greek word "tekna" which is a general term for children and is not limited to a specific age group. However, no matter the age, preschooler or young adult, the child still living in the home is

commanded to continually obey (present tense imperative which means continual obedience) his parents in all things.

Paul states *"in all things,"* which means just that. The only exception or limit that could be placed here and in verse eighteen in regards to the wife's submission to her husband would be obedience or submission to something that is contrary to God's law and man's laws, which, by the way, Paul tells us to submit to in Romans thirteen.

Here Paul gives one reason or incentive, *"for this is well pleasing unto the Lord."* "Well pleasing" means commendable. It is very similar to what Paul stated in verse eighteen in regards to the wife's incentive for being submissive to her husband. And here again, Paul attaches a spiritual significance to it when he states *"unto or in the Lord."* The second reason is found in Ephesians 6:3.

21 Just as the husband was given a warning regarding his wife, (*"be not bitter against them"*), the husband is given a warning regarding the children, (*"provoke not your children to anger"*). The word *"provoke"* means to irritate, embitter, or exasperate (NASB). John MacArthur states it may be understood as "stop nagging your kids." Why? Because always nagging, always irritating your child will lead to discouragement. A child that is always receiving negative will be negative. This is not to say that discipline, even firm discipline, is not necessary from time to time, but the fact remains, discipline must be from an attitude of loving correction rather than a hot head.

Class Interaction:

1. Why do you think Paul gave the warnings only to the husband in verses nineteen and twenty-one?

Though the warnings are given only to the husband they also apply to the wife. However, we cannot remove the culture in which Paul wrote in. In New Testament times women were held only a little higher than slaves. These cultural things naturally carried over to marriage and parental relationships. Second, to be real honest it is the man who has to deal with the very warning more often than the wife or mother.

22 The world in which Paul lived was a much different world from that we live in. Slavery was not only universally accepted but it was also a fundamental institution of society. It has been estimated that as little as half and possibly as many as two-thirds of the Roman population were slaves. Slaves were men and women who had no rights. They were the property of the master. Paul's instruction to them was simple, *"Obey in all things your masters."* It is not difficult to imagine that most slaves did not choose to obey out of a willing heart but more than likely obeyed out of fear of punishment or death. His instructions add *"not with eye service, as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart."* In other words, don't be obedient because someone is watching, be obedient because it is your desire (*"sincerity of heart"* - NASB). Also, put all your effort into being obedient (*"singleness of heart"*).

23 Verse twenty-three is similar to what Paul stated in verse seventeen. However, we must read this verse through chapter four verse one as speaking of the relationship of servants (slaves) to masters. *"Heartily"* means out of the soul. Paul's instructions would turn what seemed unimportant and menial into something of great dignity.

24-25 Beginning in verse 24 and continuing to the next verse Paul will provide two reasons why slaves should honor, respect, and serve their masters as though they were serving the Lord. The first one is positive, *"Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance..."* The word *"receive"* speaks of receiving what is due and receiving in full. The second reason is negative, *"But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done..."* This is just the opposite of what Paul just spoke of in verse twenty-four. It was a warning. In Ephesians it is the master who is warned that there is no partiality with God. Here, it is the slave who is warned that God does not show partiality towards slaves, *"and there is no respect of persons."* As Paul stated in Colossians 3:11, *"but Christ is all, and in all."*

4:1 Paul now turns to the duty of masters. Paul's words to them are treat slaves in justice and fairness because, though you may be a master of man on earth, you have a heavenly Master you will one day be called home to. These were compelling words when you consider the time in which Paul lived in.

Class Interaction:

1. How do we make application of this (vv.22-4:1)?

We often talk about the gospel being relevant to our day and yet this passage seems irrelevant to our time. It does contain some great principles that should bring about changes in our lives. Whether there are slaves or not, and there are in other parts of the world, we should view these verses in light of the fact that all of us are under someone's authority. No one is beyond authority! If I am an employee, I fall under the authority of my supervisor, manager, boss, district manager, superintendent, etc. If I am self-employed, I fall under the authority of a board of directors or under the welfare of those I oversee in my business. We live in a selfish and cruel world. The average employee does just enough to get by to not be fired and often times works only when the boss is looking. The average employer provides just the benefits or pay that is required and no more. When it is time for raises, a minimal amount is given. Profits and bonuses rule their thinking.

Paul's word to the laborer is do all you can the best you can knowing that it is the Lord you are serving. If you are working in the garment factory, the assembly line at Nissan or Ford, the local bank or credit union, teaching children or young adults, or whatever you do, do it as though Jesus was your supervisor. Do it as though the Lord was standing over your work inspecting the quality and commitment of your service.

Point: What kind of employee would Jesus be?

Paul's word to the man or woman who is the employer is treat your employees the best you possibly can. If you can provide them a raise, give them a good one. If the cost of health insurance continues to rise, help them in whatever manner you can. Treat them with respect and honor knowing that you have a Master in heaven.

Point: What kind of employer would Jesus be?

What kind of working environment would you have if both employee and employer were serving like our Lord would?

2 Beginning in verse two Paul continues the discussion of the new man that he began in 3:5. In 3:5-17, Paul spoke of personal characteristics of the new man. In 3:18-4:1, he spoke of characteristics of the new man that bring about change in our marriages, in our relationships with our children, and in our relationships with our work. Now he begins to discuss another dimension of the new man: our speech.

The Bible has much to say about what we have to say. I encourage you to look at these verses of scripture this week as part of your preparation for this lesson (Proverb 15:28, 5:3, 11:11, 12:22, Psalm 10:7, Matthew 12:34-37, II Peter 2:18, I John 1:9, Romans 10:9-10, I Peter 3:9, Proverbs 31:26, 15:1, Matthew 5:2, Luke 11:54, and James 3:2-12).

As we have already stated many times, Paul was a man devoted to prayer. Perhaps this is why he starts these verses on speech with prayer. After all, prayer is speaking to God. His instructions here are "*continue in prayer.*" The word "*continue*" is translated in other Bible translations as "*devote.*" Both speak of continuance and endurance. What would seem to be so easy, because we can pray anywhere at anytime to God is very difficult for most. Though most would think that prayer is a constant vocalization of words, prayer is that and much more. It is also a constant awareness of God and His working in our lives.

Second, Paul tells us to "*watch in the same.*" It means to keep awake. What was the problem the disciples had the night before Christ's trial and death? They could not stay awake when the Lord told them to pray. It means to pay careful attention to and be alert about the things for which we are in prayer and the things we should be praying about. We often times pray vague general prayers that God can answer, but if He did, we would not know it. Paul's instructions are for us to pray with special attention to details; in other words, be specific.

Point: Persistent prayer brings perceptive prayer.

Third, prayer is meant to be a time of *“thanksgiving.”* It may be that what we are praying for is not something cheerful. It may be something of great pain that we are praying about. However, the fact that we can come before a holy God and turn these matters over to Him should bring thanksgiving to our hearts.

3 *“Withal praying also for us.”* *“Withal”* is one of those English words we no longer use. It means at the same time as every modern version interprets it. There are many times in the New Testament that Paul commands us to pray but there are few in which he specifically calls on believers to pray for him. I am sure he understood that if they were consistently praying, they would be praying for him because persistent prayer leads to perceptive prayer. However, Paul’s prayer was not just pray for us but pray for us *“that God would open unto us a door of utterance...”* A *“door”* in the New Testament speaks of opportunity. He wrote of a *“door”* in I Corinthians 16:8-9 and in II Corinthians 2:12. Both of these references and this one in this verse speak of evangelism. In years past, our Southern Baptist Convention focused a lot of missions money and personnel towards China. We have a very rich history of our mission work there that goes back long before I was born. The reason for the focus was because of something that has happened in my lifetime, the return of Hong Kong from British rule to the Chinese government. Our leaders understood that while the British government held control of this great country the *“door”* was open for evangelism. They also understood that once turned over to the Chinese government, it would mean a door closed due to communism. That is exactly what has happened. The door for us to openly evangelize is closed but what we have left behind are thousands of Chinese believers who can confront their own people with the Gospel.

Paul was telling them to pray that the door would open so we can *“speak the mystery of Christ.”* It was for this that he was *“in bonds,”* but it did not stop the work.

4 Paul further expounds on what he just stated by adding *“that I make it manifest.”* It is true that Paul’s imprisonment did not curtail his prayers, but it did prevent him from preaching the gospel in areas that needed to hear it. Here he gets even more specific by saying, *“I want to make it manifest.”* The word *“manifest”* means to make it clear. In other words, *“Pray that these prison doors would be opened.”*

Notice how he closes this verse out, *“as I ought to speak.”* There was no selfish motive behind his request for their prayers. There was no desire for his personal advancement. He wanted to proclaim Christ because he was supposed to proclaim Christ. It was his driving force. Is it yours?

5 If I were to ask you, *“What is the greatest hindrance to the gospel in our day, what would be your response?”* I am sure the answers would vary depending on where you are and what your experience has been. I am sure answers like communism would come up, but no matter what answer comes to mind, we are the biggest hindrance to the gospel. The people who claim to have embraced the gospel are the greatest hindrance to the gospel because of the way they live. To be real honest, I have a difficult time distinguishing the difference between those that are *“without”* (lost) and those who are with (saved). This is why Paul instructs us to *“walk in wisdom.”* We have seen the word *“walk”* many times and to the best of my memory it always refers to the manner in which we live our lives. Our time on earth can be difficult. It can be complicated. This is why we must have wisdom. We must know how to practically live our lives so our lives will not distract the lost (*“without”*) from Christ. However, our walk on this earth cannot only be difficult and complicated, it is also limited. That’s good news for born again believers! We are here for a short time. I can remember when life seemed to trickle by so slowly. Now, it seems to rush by so fast. Those older than me tell me life goes even faster as you get older. Before you know it, a lifetime has come and gone. This is why Paul says, *“redeeming the time.”* The word *“redeeming”* means to buy out or purchase completely. Unfortunately, we cannot buy back. Time is a nonrenewable resource. Once it is past, it is gone forever. It slips away like grains of sand in our hands. How many times have you said, *“I’m going to _____”* (you fill in the blanks), only to still be saying the same thing a year later? *“Redeeming”* in the present context means to make the most of every opportunity.

Class Interaction:

1. In the context of this verse, what is Paul talking about when he says *“redeeming the time”*?

Answer: *“toward them that are without”*

2. In the context of this paragraph (vv.2-9), what is Paul talking about?

Answer: The *“door,”* which always speaks of evangelism.

3. In the context of the entire section (3:1-4:18), what is Paul talking about?

Answer: A life that is so changed (*“mortified, put off, put on, submit, provoke not, obey, serve”*) that those *“without”* are attracted to those that are with- evangelism.

Point: It’s all about evangelism!

6 I probably should have placed the discussion of verses five and six together for here again Paul’s bottom line is evangelism. Our speech is to *“always”* be *“with grace.”* To speak with grace means to speak with gentleness, wholesomeness, thoughtfulness, and purposeful. Second, our speech is to be *“seasoned with salt.”* Salt has three purposes: to flavor, to preserve, and to create thirst. What we say should be stimulation like the salt we flavor our food with. What we say should prevent and rebuke the deadness of this world. What we say should create a thirst that only the Lord can quench.

The Lord tells us that *“ye are the salt of the earth”* just before he tells us that *“ye are the light of the world.”* Both of descriptions come right after He says, *“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake”* (Matthew 5).

Point: It is easy to say the right things or to say the things that we know others should hear when everything around us is perfect, but what about the times when it is not?

If our lives are consistent with the Word of God and if our speech is consistent with the Word of God, opportunities will arise where a *“door”* of opportunity will open for us to *“speak the mystery of Christ.”* We must have our answer ready- *“that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”* At the right time we must have the right answers!

To God be the Glory!

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