

Colossians 3:18

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 September 2016

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] And we come to Colossians chapter 3, page 984.!

If you'd be among that small gathering of believers in the home of Philemon, in Colossae, on the day that this letter arrived, and by the hand of Tishkis and Nesimus, it was brought all the way into Rome, where Paul was imprisoned, I wonder if he would have felt the jarring change of tone in Colossians chapter 3.

The crunching of the gears in these verses. Because there is an unexpected surprise, there's an unexpected change of subject.

Because at this point of the letter, as you listen to Tishkis read it, during the first half of chapter 3, they hear this magnificent description of the life of the one who believes in Christ Jesus.

The incredible privilege of being a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. The wonder of our union with Christ. It's past, and it's present, and it's future.

[1 : 53] Chapter 3, verses 1 to 4. You have this transformation of that life that is united to Christ. Verses 5 to 11. You have the quality of that life that is united to the cosmic Christ.

In chapter 3, verses 12 to 17. And then you come to chapter 3, verse 18. And I'm not for a moment alluding to the awkwardness that we feel about these words in our society.

And we're going to come to that. But I think we need to really sense and feel and emphasise the astonishing shift in the letter of Colossians.

That you move from the cosmic work of Christ. The image of the invisible God. Who is reconciling and bringing together all things together.

Whether on earth or in heaven. And then you go to this tiny little domestic scene in a home in Colossae. Wives. Husband.

[3 : 01] Children. Fathers. And we need to appreciate that when Paul starts to say something about family life. It's family life for those who are united to Christ.

And in these verses, Paul is still talking about the consequences of the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That that event of immense significance.

That Christ has died. And that Christ is risen. And Christ is in glory. That is intended to bring order and peace back to the chaos of all things.

That's what we see in Colossians. And we must understand that this same Christ. And this same work of Christ. Brings order and peace to the family.

To your family. And to my family. And before we concentrate on the details. And they are very specific details of these four verses.

[4 : 04] I want to kind of just draw your attention to their general shape. And we'll waggle on the tea a bit tonight. I think immediately you're struck by what? What are you struck by in these verses?

You're struck by their brevity on you. I don't know what I would say if I was asked to say something significant about the Christian family in less than 50 words.

If I said to you, you've got two tweets. I thought you've got two tweets to speak about the Christian family. Well now I know, don't I? I just picked Paul's words.

And in another place, namely in the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Paul does elaborate a little bit on these brief lines. Nonetheless, I think the fact that he's so brief in Colossians chapter 3 encourages us to think that this is the bare essentials.

This is the essentials of family life. This is what Paul chooses to tell you when he's only got 50 words. The second thing I want to notice about these words is it's an ordered household.

[5 : 14] It's very ordered. The way in which a wife is to relate to a husband. The way a husband is to relate to his wife. The way children are to relate to the parents.

And the way a father is to relate to the children. It is ordered here. My home, we sometimes say, it's absolute chaos. It's an unblipped little thing to say.

Earlier Paul has told the readers, haven't you? This is not just here. The chapter 2 verse 5. For though I'm absent in body, I'm not there with you, yet I am with you in spirit. And I rejoice.

Why do I rejoice? To see your good order. And your firmness of your faith in Christ Jesus. Faith in Jesus Christ brings order to life.

It puts the broken back together. Faith in Christ reorders life. Faith in Christ brings order to chaos. That's the nature of the gospel.

[6 : 17] And just as we can do it in Ephesians, Jesus will bring order to the totality of all things. One place where there's good order to be seen is in the marriages of believers.

And in the family of believers. Now what is meant by order, we'll come to in a minute when we come to the details of these verses. But before we get there, I just want us to notice the general shape of what Paul says here.

And the context in this particular clearly tells us, it clearly implies that marriages and families need to be redeemed. They need to be redeemed.

Marriage and family are not institutions that have somehow escaped the ravages of the fall.

Marriages and families can be places of terrible chaos.

Marriages and families can be places of darkness and hurt and wickedness. And sadly even Christian marriages can be like that.

[7 : 20] And I think sometimes we have a very sentimental view of marriage and family. And those of us who are unmarried, we need to realise that as much as those of us who are married.

That marriage and family are not a haven from the chaos. Marriage and family are not a haven from the chaos where your sinfulness will do no harm.

And you will be unharmed by the sinfulness of others. The marriage and the unmarried amongst us. Sometimes I think we think that either we long.

We think of a marriage or a family. It's a place where I can just be myself. That's what I want.

Marriage or family can be a place where I just let my hair down.

Marriage or family can be a place of no restraints. It can be a place of safety or haven like that. But everything human needs redemption.

[8 : 27] Doesn't it? And we are dangerously deceived if we hope that a life situation will bring by itself peace.

And security. And happiness. And I suspect many of us are unrealistic about our marriages and our families. And particularly about the marriages and families of others.

And so I have to say to you, if you are discontent as a single person, in all likelihood you will be discontent when you're married.

We have today, don't we, our own particularly culturally conditioned kind of sentimentality.

And this is the view that freedom from restraint, freedom for me to be myself, that is the path to fulfilment and happiness. And if we cannot be free from restraint in our home, if we cannot be relaxed and unguarded and undisciplined in our home, then where can we be?

[9 : 44] I was with a friend this week. His marriage was broken up. And he said to me, I'm so happy now because I can just be me. It wasn't me.

And I said, that's rubbish and you know it. The answer to where can I be relaxed and unguarded and undisciplined in our family life, where can that be?

Well, I think that is a very unsettling answer that the Bible gives us. Because the Bible's answer is nowhere. There is nowhere where you can just let your guard down, be yourself, relax, have no restraint.

There is nowhere this side of heaven. There is nowhere where it is safe for you to simply be yourself. And for me to be myself.

Not until myself has been totally redeemed. And I've become a totally redeemed son of God. That doesn't mean there's no difference between my life in my home and life outside it.

[10 : 53] It just means that I am no more safe in my family than anywhere else. To pursue happiness simply through personal and unrestrained freedom.

The order of life in my family, it'll certainly be different from the order of life outside of it. In some ways it's more difficult, isn't it? Because it's more intimate. But the core of the words of Scripture here that come to us today are to know the redeeming power of Jesus Christ and his work in your

marriage and in your family.

And in your life. And so we ask, what shape does the redemption of Jesus Christ bring to my marriage and my family? What difference does it make?

And Paul provides us with a really brief but profound outline. Four things. A word to wives. A word to husbands. A word to children. And then a word to fathers or parents.

A word to husbands. Verse 18. Verse to wives. Wives. Wives. Submit to your husbands. As is fitting in the Lord.

[12:04] It's important for us to appreciate. And it's very difficult for us to appreciate. Therefore. So it's all the more important that you put the effort in to understand why these words are so appalling to your ears.

And it's the true related ideas we accept in our culture. And they become embedded in the consciousness of our culture. The first I've tried to repeat already.

That is that human happiness is found in a kind of independent human freedom. That's where I get happy. And these words, don't they? Verse 18.

They seem to deny that freedom. And therefore. They deny the possibility of happiness for wives. And how atrocious is that? The second idea.

Which is very, very common. Is that a person who subordinates. A person who submits himself or herself to another. Is thereby somehow diminished as a person.

[13:01] That if you have to submit to someone else. You are somehow diminished as a person. And so these words then seem to make wives. You see that inferior to husbands. The offense of Colossians 3.18 to our ears.

And the offense of many similar statements in the pages of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Is unavoidable if you accept those two ideas. It should be unavoidable.

Sometimes we see Christian people who retain both those ideas. That actually freedom can only be. Happiness can only be found in true freedom from restraint.

And to submit oneself to another diminishes yourself as a person. And we see people who retain both those ideas. And yet insist on Colossians 3.18 that it's the word of God.

And they accept the offensive conclusions. But husbands have a freedom to pursue their own happiness. But wives do not. And husbands in this kind of sense.

[14:09] Are somehow superior to their wives. The problem is not with being offended by those conclusions. I want you to be offended by them. You should be outraged by those conclusions.

The problem is. Those two ideas are actually non-Christian. That is not what it's saying here. Our new life in Christ is very different.

From our culture's notion of liberation. Do you remember chapter 3 and verse 12 and following. Where we hear that those who have died with Christ.

Have been raised with Christ. And they will appear with Christ in glory. And they are to live lives now with compassion. Not freedom.

From the demands of others. The person who is a Christian is to live a life of kindness. Not self-centred importance. They are to exercise humility.

[15:12] Not superiority. There is to be meekness. Not assertiveness. There is to be patience with one another. Not impatience. And we are to bear with one another.

And if one has a complaint against the other. We are to forgive each other. As the Lord has forgiven you. And above all. In this new life in Christ. You put on love. And it's only this radical understanding of life.

As Christ shapes it. And life as Christ reorders it. And life as Christ fixes it up. It is only with this understanding.

That you can sensibly approach. The particulars of family life in Christ. What then we ask. Does Paul mean by wives. Submit to your husbands.

As is fit in to the Lord. Submit. What does it mean? Well literally. The Greek word. Could literally mean. To be.

[16:12] To be. To order yourself under. That's really it. To put yourself under. That's the general idea. And the really striking thing is.

I want to argue with you tonight. But that is the message of the New Testament. To put yourself under. Comes up again and again and again. So let me explain to you just.

Some of the ways that the New Testament. Describes that. Let me give you a quick picture. Of what putting ourselves. Under another looks like. Because I want to say to you.

It's a characteristic of what it is. To be a Christian. We have to put ourselves under God. Hebrews 2. Hebrews 12. And then James 4. We have to put ourselves under his law.

Romans chapter 8. We have to put ourselves. Under Christ. Ephesians 5. We have to put ourselves. Under the governing authorities.

[17:11] Romans 13. Titus 3. 1 Peter 2. We have to put ourselves. Under ministers of the gospel. And elders. 1 Corinthians 16. Slaves are to put themselves.

Under their masters. Titus 2. 1 Peter 2. Young men are to put themselves. Under older men. 1 Peter 5. Children are to put themselves.

Under parents. Luke chapter 2. Wives are to put themselves. Under husbands. Ephesians 5. 2 Peter 3. Colossians 3. And indeed. There's that rather striking.

Exhortation. Isn't there? In Ephesians 5. Verse 21. Put yourself. Under one another. How to reverence for Christ. Now on the basis of that.

And it's striking material. That runs right the way through the New Testament. I think it's quite reasonable to argue. That the New Testament teaches you. A subordination.

[18:07] A submitting ethic. In how we're to live. That is the way that the new humanity is constituted. It's the way that the disintegration of our society.

Is to be redeemed. Not by individual liberation. From restraint. And from obligations to others. But by each one gladly placing himself or herself.

Under the ones God has placed over us. And so in the case of wives. We must notice. Paul affirms that to place themselves. Under their husbands.

Can you see what it is? Verse 18. Is fitting. In the Lord. It's not an accommodation. To an ancient patriarchal society.

But fitting. To the Lord. The husband as Paul puts it elsewhere. Is the head of the wife.

[19:11] Now it doesn't help you so much so far. I think. And I want to say. Just as we must not capitulate. To kind of secular. Liberationist philosophies. Here we must also take care.

That we are not taken captive. To our own human traditions. In some measure. We have to say. Don't we. That the kind of liberationist.

Philosophies. Have been in reaction. To some pretty inexcusable conduct. Of some men. And sometimes Christian men. You see. This very teaching.

That we are looking at today. It's sometimes been taken by men. And it's provided a framework. For the most appalling chauvinism. And self-centered. Greedy assertiveness.

A husband. A husband. Requiring. His wife. To meet all his needs. To serve his interest. To fulfil his desires. To bow to his selfish interest.

[20:07] And that can be very ugly indeed. And it's no wonder. That with such horrors in the background. That many of us feel. A certain attraction. To the kind of. Liberationist philosophies.

But they are a false answer. The Bible's answer. Is to actually understand. The character. Of the husband's headship. Under which. The Christian wife. Is called to put herself under.

So let me tell you. Very. Cleverly. That verse 18. Must be understood. In the light of verse 19. Alright. Verse.

The submission of wives. Must be understood. In the light of the word to husbands. Husbands. Husbands. Love your wives. Verse 19. Do not be harsh with them. The husband's responsibility. Is solemn. God given. Responsibility. Is the well being of his wife. Husbands. Love. Your wives. It has always been.

[21:08] Far too easy. For a man to say. I love you. To a woman. The words to husbands here. Is not a call. To utter the words. But to live the reality.

I remember. I read something. Once. I saw something on the telly. Where. Christian Madden said. You know. He told his wife. That he loved her. Every day. And how. That was a great thing.

So I tried it. For a little while. I love you. The problem is. You have a big argument. Before you go to bed. Don't you? And then you suddenly. Realize. I haven't told her. That I love her. And so after kind of. 20 minutes of stone-coated silence.

You say. I love you. Come here. You say. You're not called. To say. I love you every day. You can say if you want. But I don't think the Bible tells you.

You have to. But the Bible does say. You live the reality of it. And it's always been far too easy. For a man to say. I love you. To a woman. The Bible calls you to live the reality.

[22 : 07] Husbands. Love your wives. And again. It's in a full recognition. Of our need of redemption. And that our marriages need redemption. Reject any sentimental view of marriage.

And do you see. The very real tendency. From which husbands. From what we need to be delivered. Is identified here. What's the temptation. Verse 19. Do not be harsh with them. And that can be translated. Do not become bitter towards them. And it's a tragic. Ever present. In the possibility of marriage bitterness.

Perhaps particularly for a husband. When a wife disappoints. A husband's hopes and ambitions. When she does not live up to his unrealistic ideals. For bitterness.

And then harshness. To be close at hand. Husbands. Love your wives. And do not be harsh with them. Do not become bitter.

[23 : 07] There is no more place. For selfishness. And self-centered liberty. For self-seeking assertiveness. Assertiveness. There is no more place for these things. In a Christian husband.

Than there is in a Christian wife. And it's ever so important for us to see. And it's very very important for you to see. That wives are called. To put themselves under husbands.

Who are called. To love them. That's how it works. The idea in this context. Is not first and foremost. And for a wife. To place herself. Under the authority. Of her husband. That's not the idea here. Is it? When we think of the word. Submit. We immediately go to the word.

Authority. But that's not where Paul goes. First and foremost. The wife is to place herself. Under his love. Under his love. And I want you to think about that.

[24 : 02] For a moment. Because it's a distinctly. It's a distinctly. Distinctively. Distinctive way. Of understanding life. For a moment. I mentioned earlier.

That the New Testament. I would argue. Has got this subordination. This submitting ethic. And we notice. The range of situations. Which Christians.

Are called to put themselves. Under others. And in each case. If you work your way through them. The one who we are called. To submit to. Is the one who's got responsibility.

For our welfare. And it goes against. The grain. Of the kind of. Liberationist. Philosophies. But the reordering of life.

The fixing up. Of the mess. That this world. Has got itself into. In our lives. And we've got into. Got ourselves into. The fixing up. Of the mess. That comes with Christ.

[24 : 58] Involves. Not the assertion. Of independence. That's not the gospel. But the life. Of the Christian. Man or woman. Is an embracing.

Of dependence. Isn't it? That is how it is. With the Lord Jesus himself. He is our. Saviour. But how do you. Receive.

Salvation. You submit. To him. As Lord. And does that. Involve his authority. Of course it does. But it's an authority.

For our good. By his grace. And it's just. Impossible. It is impossible. For you to say. I want Christ's salvation. But I want to be independent. I want his salvation.

But I don't want to live. With him as Lord. It's impossible. No. He is our saviour. By being our Lord. Same in all other areas.

[25 : 55] Of Christian submission. Submission. Is never permission. For authoritarian. Tyranny. Or bullying. Wives. Submit to your husbands.

Makes full sense. Only alongside. Husbands. Love your wives. And the fulfilment of. Each side of this relationship. Is dependent on the other.

Isn't it? Husbands. Must take. Some responsibility. For making their wives. Submission to them. A good and a joyful thing. And wives.

Must take. Some responsibility. For their husbands. Loving them. And that being. A good and joyful thing. And it will be. For each husband. And each wife. Hearing these words.

To work out. In your situation. What does it mean. In our marriage. For Christ Jesus. To be our Lord. Wives. Submit to your husbands. As is fitting. The Lord. Husbands. Love your wives.

[26 : 49] And do not be harsh for them. There's 20. Children. Here's the word for you. There's 20. Children. Obey your parents. In everything. For this pleases the Lord. There's a t-shirt.

I saw someone in it. The other week. And it said on the front of it. There's a woman wearing it. Thankfully. That said. And because I'm the mother. That's why. And that expresses. As I talked

about. In the kids talk.

The kind of normal. And understandable frustration. Of the child. Who's constantly asking. Why. Why. Why. He or she needs to do. As they're told. And that t-shirt. Though I like it. I don't think that is the full picture.

The obedience of children. Is not for the sake. Of the parents. Not first. The obedience of the children. Is for those who are responsible. To care for them. The authority of the parent. Is to be exercised. For the care of the child. That is the context. Of the obedience. That is called for. Disobedient children. Contribute.

[27 : 49] To dysfunctional families. Children. When you disobey. When you disobey. You hinder your parents.

Love and care. Do you know that? Do you know that? Is it? And it should help us to see. The force of the words. In everything.

Obedience changes. As a child grows up. The obedience. Required. Corresponds to the parent's. Responsibility. So.

Your parents. They are responsible. For you now. Isn't it? For many of the little ones. They are totally responsible. For pretty much everything. But that will change. As time goes on. And the scope.

Of your obedience. Will change. But do notice. It is comprehensive. Obey. Your parents.

[28 : 47] Can you see it? Why are you doing it? Because this. Pleases. The Lord. This pleases. The Lord. A word to fathers.

To close. Paul turns to fathers. Although this word. Does apply. Perhaps to. Well. To fathers. And mothers. But it is. Particularly addressed. We have to say that. To fathers here. Who are in need of this.

Verse 21. Fathers. Do not provoke your children. Lest they become discouraged. What kind of behaviour. Does Paul have in mind here?

Well. I suspect. Most of us dads. Have got a pretty good idea. Haven't we? It is those words. Or those actions. Or the absence.

Of those words. And those actions. That can make our children. Fearful and timid. And lacking in normal self confidence.

[29 : 46] It is not uncommon. For strong fathers. To bemoan the fact. That their children. Are so unconfident. And tragically.

What can happen. Is a father. Can use their strength. To crush. And undermine. Their children. And so. What is our responsibility. As children.

As fathers. One of our responsibility. Is to support. And encourage. Our children. We have great responsibility.

And yet. We must see. From this verse. Do not provoke. Well. What is the opposite. Of that. It is. It is support. Isn't it? And don't let them. Become discouraged.

This life is very discouraging. For our children. In many ways. And so. What must we be as fathers. We must be encouragers. Of our children. There are four brilliant.

[30 : 40] Sentences from the Bible. Aren't they? And they sketch for us. In bare outline. And I love the way. They are so brief. Isn't it? It's going to look different. In your family. The Ray family.

From the Craddock family. It's going to look different. In my family. The Bible is. Does not have this huge parenting manual. Which I'm very very thankful for.

Aren't you? And so the Lord has given us minds. And has given us his Holy Spirit. And has given us one another. To help us work out the concrete expressions. Of these relationships.

And so it's right. Isn't it? It is right. When we want to throttle our children. And we've had a difficult week. That we talk to one another about it. We don't pretend everything's okay in our family.

Because it isn't. The proponent of this is here. Is the essential shape of marriage and family. That under the controlling.

[31 : 33] And reconciling. And ordering lordship. Of Jesus Christ. You and I need these words. Because our families.

And our marriages. Are as marred. And distorted. And fragile. As we are. And these are healing words. These are redeeming words.

And these are constructive words. For wives. For husbands. For children. For parents.

And for all of us. Who care about Christian marriages and families. Let's pray. Let's pray.