

RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS**Colossians 3:18-4:1**

Intro: Some of you have heard me tell this story about my neighbor named Jerry. I used to change his name to protect his identity, but the summer of discontent where our lives intersected so negatively is now going on 40 years ago and took place almost 400 miles away, so I no longer think I need to disguise him by calling him Harry. It can be told in an entire sermon and I do not want to do that this morning so I must radically abbreviate the saga of a feud that nearly reached the level of the Hatfield's and the McCoy's or the Montague's and Capulet's.

Jerry was a brawny bully in our neighborhood. He and his brawny wife and their two brawny sons lived next door to us. Jerry seemed to revel in making everyone who lived around him spitting mad. He loved to stir up trouble like a roaring fire and then throw gas on it with more trouble. He made everyone so mad that they went to the developer of the growing community we lived in and asked him to do something about this thorn in the community's side. The developer reached out to me to help him in mediating the crisis that literally was coming close to out and out violence. You see, I prided myself, being a young pastor in a new pastoral assignment at the little church down the road, with being the one person who got along with Jerry.

And then Jerry made ME mad! That takes some doing. I can endure a lot, but Jerry pushed me over the edge. Using my little dog as a tool to get my goat, he made it so that I received a citation for allowing my dog to run wantonly through the neighborhood. I had to pay a fine with money I didn't have as a new and young pastor in the community. I thought the charge was ridiculous so I went before the Justice of the Peace for my day in court. And there sat Jerry and his wife as witnesses for the prosecution. They testified against me and they lied. Jerry said nasty things about me. I felt violated and betrayed. I lost my case. I paid my fine, now with court costs attached. And I began to hate Jerry with a fervor that I had never before or since known.

I so wanted to get back at this bully of the neighborhood. I am not lying when I say that I would mow my lawn, thinking, as I mowed in one direction, "If I could just put a chain from his axle to his garden shed that would be a fitting punishment for being a jerk!" And then as I mowed in the other direction, I would think, "No, I'm the one being a jerk! This is no way for a Christ follower to think of a fellow human being. I need to love Jerry because he is a child of God for whom Christ died!" And then as I mowed in the other direction I would stew in the juices of a more sinister plot to get back at the man who had done me so terribly wrong.

You understand, that I am cutting this story is way short – and it's still too long. I could be so much more descriptive about why I had such a depth of anger.

Since bullies are, in actuality cowards, Jerry, once he had committed his naughtiness, made himself scarce whenever I was around. And I wanted with every fiber of my being to get right up in his face and tell him what I thought of him. I didn't know what I'd say, but I knew I'd say something. Finally about a month after my day in court, Jerry and his family were out cleaning out their Rottweiler pens at Sheila (age three at the time) and I drove by. I stopped, jumped out of my Renault Alliance, and made for him, intending to read him the riot act. But I never got to do any acting, other than acting like the fool that I was. Because he began laughing and pointed behind me and I turned around and saw the Renault Alliance, with Sheila in it, rolling down the hill, because I had not set the emergency brake.

I caught the car before it went very far, and in shame and embarrassment drove away. And something in my spirit said "*Nice move Reverend Tyson!*"

I cooked in that anger and hate for probably another month before I realized that I was getting nowhere in my life. I had no peace, I had no joy, and I realized I had no relationship with my Lord. At the time I was reading a newly published book entitled, *TOUCH THE WORLD THROUGH PRAYER* by Wesley Duewel. As I was reading one afternoon, a sentence caught my eye. I don't remember the exact wording, but I remember the concept. It was something to the effect, of if you are harboring an unresolved grievance against another human being you will have effectively built an impenetrable wall between you and God. That was it! I had walled off my relationship with God with one brick of hate stacked on the other.

The truth was, I was out of a right relationship with Jerry. And whether or not I wanted it, or whether or not Jerry wanted it, I knew that I needed to love Jerry and strive to make our relationship one that was pleasing to God.

I'm making a long story terribly short, but over the next year or two I endeavored to be kind to Jerry until he was kind back to me. After another year or two we became friends. After another year or two Jerry and his family began going to a very good church in our community. It wasn't my church but it was pastored by a good friend of mine. And after another year or two Jerry and his entire family were gloriously saved and with incredible joy he shared that he had been baptized. He was literally a new man. No longer a bully. The beautiful thing was, he had become my brother in Christ.

God wants us to be in right relationship with those around us. He doesn't want us to fall into the traps that Satan sets for us. Instead, he wants us to be salt and light in a dark world.

That brings me to our text for today from Colossians. When we left off two weeks ago, Paul had moved into some very practical teaching in the early part of chapter 3. What we have today is even more so as he teaches about relating to the other people we have in our life.

Let me read the text now then unpack some things that may help the communion we have at the end of this service to be even more meaningful.

(Read Colossians 3:18-4:1)

As you can see Paul is showing how our walk with Christ works itself out in our everyday relationships, because being Jesus is an incredibly practical process. So first, we see that everyone one who follows Jesus...

Obligation goes both ways

- In a world that focuses with narcissistic precision, Christ Followers have a reciprocal obligation. It is never an ethic on which all the duties are on one side. Barclay points out that *"The Christian ethic is one of mutual obligation, in which the rights and the obligations rest with every person. It is an ethic of mutual responsibility; and, therefore, it becomes an ethic where the thought of privilege and rights falls into the background and where the thought of duty and obligation becomes paramount. The whole direction of the Christian ethic is not to ask: "What do others owe to me?" but, "What do I owe to others?"* In other words, selfish should never be the description of a Christ Follower.
- Paul was introducing new concepts to the Colossians and, truth be told, they are still new 2000 years later. The really new thing Paul was sharing was in the area of personal relationships, and it is this: for the Christ Follower, all relationships are in the Lord. The whole of the Christian life is lived in Christ. Everywhere we are the people of God. It's the very essence of being Jesus. Christ Followers do not have compartmentalized lives. In our homes our relating to one another needs to be dictated by and fully aware of that fact that Jesus Christ is an actual presence. As parents and children interact we need to look to the example of our heavenly parent and what it is to be his children. And as we live out our life in the workaday world we are to . . . *work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.* Colossians 3:23
- The new thing about Christ Followers and their personal relationships is that Jesus Christ is introduced as we live out our lives in him. And one of those new things was that Christianity brought in is...

A new marriage paradigm

- Under Jewish law a woman was a possession of her husband. In his list of possessions she was little higher than his worldly goods and livestock. She had few, if any, legal rights. He could divorce her for burning his dinner or because he found a better or more beautiful or younger wife. She could divorce him on if he came down with leprosy or was a rapist (being an adulterer was not enough). All rights and privileges belonged to the husband.
- But Greek and Roman marriage laws and customs made Jewish marriage laws and customs look like a picnic. In Greco-Roman culture the wife was a possession and not to be seen or heard. They were for the purpose of bearing and caring for children and little else.
- Paul gave a new directive that, as we just saw, gave mutual obligation to both the husband AND the wife. As he does in Ephesians where he teaches *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* Ephesians 5:22 he says the same in Colossians but for the submission to be *fitting in the Lord.* (v. 18). It's not a one-way street – both must submit, as is fitting in the Lord. And the husband is to love his wife and not be harsh – in fact he should treat her with all kindness. Notice there is no suggestion at all of inferiority being attached to the wife.

- Barclay points out that “*The practical effect of the marriage laws and customs of ancient times was that the husband became an unquestioned dictator and the wife little more than a servant to bring up his children and to minister to his needs. The fundamental effect of this Christian teaching is that marriage becomes a partnership. It becomes something which is entered into not merely for the convenience of the husband, but in order that both husband and wife may find a new joy and a new completeness in each other. Any marriage in which everything is done for the convenience of one of the partners and where the other exists simply to gratify the needs and desires of the first, is not a Christian marriage.*”
- So Paul is clearly teaching that marriage was as God intended from the beginning a partnership of mutuality, and also that...

Parenting is not for wimps

- Once again in Jewish society children had a higher standing than in Greek and Roman culture, where children were often little more than tools or bargaining chips, and a father held all the rights of life and death over them.
- In our present age when parental authority is being challenged more and more, we have opportunity to show what the Christ honoring home looks like. So, here Paul tells kids to obey your parents not just because it was their obligation but because it . . . *pleases the Lord.* (v 20).
- But it doesn't stop with kids, Paul tells Dads, to love their kids enough to discipline them and enough for them to know they love you. Tell them! In my reading for this message I found that John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, apparently never felt grace from his father, as is evident his statement, "*I know that my father loved me—but he did not seem to wish me to see it.*" And Martin Luther's father was so hard on him that Luther, as long as he lived struggled to pray: "*Our Father.*" The word father in his mind stood for nothing but severity. Even the great reformer could not get past his painful memories of brutality from a man who should have been offering love and nurture.
- The better a parent is, the more they must avoid the danger of discouraging their children. One commentator suggested parents give discipline and encouragement in equal parts. This is not only a witness to children, it's a witness for the world.
- And finally, Paul offers...

A new way of working

- In our text Paul is referring to the owner/slave relationship but it can easily be transferred to the modern idea of the employer/employee relationship. Listen and learn.
- Paul says things which must have made both parties scratch their heads in wonder.—it was so revolutionary. He tells the slave to be must be a conscientious workman. He is in effect saying that his faith in Christ must necessarily make him a better and more efficient slave. Translate that to today – where we are the workers – Being a Christ Follower never, ever offers anything but hard work.
- Pauls' theology of work comes out clearly here: Work hard and with integrity even when no one is watching. At the same time, the master must treat the slave not like a thing, but like a person, with justice and with the equity which goes beyond justice. The business owner of boss has a reciprocal obligation – the worker works hard and the boss administers with fairness, integrity and consistency.
- How is that done?
 - The worker must do everything as if he was doing it for Christ. We do not work for pay or for ambition or to satisfy an earthly master; instead we are working to satisfy a much higher authority Jesus Christ.
 - And the master/boss must remember that he too has a master/boss in Jesus. He is answerable to God, just as his workers are answerable to him.
- Peterson says it best as he paraphrases vv. 22-25, *And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being a follower of Jesus doesn't cover up bad work.* Colossians 3:22b-25 (The Message)

- Remember that, whether you are a boss or a worker, or a son or a daughter or a father or a mother or a husband or a wife, being a follower of Jesus doesn't cover up bad work.

Conclusion: We need to move to communion and as we do, we can be thinking of relationships that we need to make right: Maybe it's your relationship with God himself, maybe it's with your spouse, maybe it's with a sibling, or a child, or a parent, or your boss. Let's pray and ponder that.

And we're going to have an opportunity to confess those sins that have taken us into perhaps the wrong relationship or relationship that is not what it should be. And we'll put them at the foot of the cross as we take communion together. Amen.