

## “The New Perspective In Relationships”

Colossians 3:17 – 4:1

Series: Book of Colossians [#09 in Series]

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Theme: **Your Relationships Should Be Grounded In Christ.**

### Introduction.

The last two weeks we have been looking at the new perspective believers have because they are in Christ. Our thinking and living now is to be focused on things above, the things of heaven, rather than on the things of earth. This new perspective is to be displayed throughout all our lives as we put off the dirty old clothes of sin and put on the clean new clothes of righteousness.

The section for today deals with relationships. Specifically, relationships between wives and husbands, children and parents and workers and employers. Relationships are important. God created us to be in relationships with others, as well as in a relationship with Himself. Good relationships contribute to good health, while poor relationships contribute to poor health. Good relationships are important to doing well in the workplace as well as the family.

Good relationships don't just happen. They need to be grounded in the right kind of motivation, plans and work. But some people don't see this. To them, good relationships “just happen” or, “just don't happen.” Building a good relationship is in some ways like building a house. When you build a house you don't call the suppliers, have all the materials dropped on site, and then go out to admire your nice new house. You would see the potential, the nice materials, but not the house. To build a house you need to start with a plan, and follow up with a lot of work until it is finished. Relationships start with a plan—what do you want in this relationship, and how do you get there? Then you work on that plan, on the relationship, and keep working for it to be what you want it to be, what it should be.

Being in Christ gives us a “*New Perspective In Relationships.*” The bottom line is that *Your Relationships Should Be Grounded In Christ.* We need to ground every relationship in Christ. We begin today with our motivations—motivations that are both our guiding principles and goals. Not any motivations will do. They need to be the correct ones, God's.

### **Your Relationships Should Be Grounded in Correct Motivations.**

We see at least three motives for relationships in this section, one from each of the relationships Paul addresses. While each motive is connected to a specific relationship, each one has an application to all our relationships.

The first motivation is to obey God. Every relationship and every aspect of each relationship should be driven and measured by obedience to God. We see this in the obligation of submission in verse 18, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

This and all other obligations in all relationships, are to be grounded in and motivated by obedience to God. We see this in the last phrase of the verse, “*as is fitting in the Lord.*” We are “in the Lord,” in Christ. We have ...

- life from Him;
- we are identified with and belong to Him;
- we have access to His wisdom and strength;
- we are witnesses and ambassadors for Him.

Our perspective of all of life should now be “in the Lord” — centered in who He is and who we are in this relationship as we abide in His love and love Him by obeying His commandments (*cf.* John 15:9-10, 14). Paul tells us this “is fitting.” It is appropriate, it is proper in light of who Christ is, in light of all He has done for us, and who we now are in Him. It is not optional.

Obedience. Obedience is difficult in our time and place. Rejection of authority of any kind seems to be at an all time high. Relativism pervades our culture’s mind—“Whatever. It is all up to what you or I think or feel.”

*But*, obedience has been difficult ever since sin entered the human family. We naturally rebel at authority, we bristle at *obedience*. One example from over 3,000 years ago displays both our natural attitude and God’s attitude toward obedience.

Saul was a tall, handsome, talented young man of 30 when He became the first king of Israel. The people had longed for a king. On the day he was crowned they shouted, “Long live the king!” (1 Samuel 10:24).

God gave the new king a great victory over the Philistines. *But*, Saul failed to obey Samuel the prophet by waiting for him to come to offer sacrifices to God. He did it himself. When the prophet confronted him, Saul made excuses. Samuel told him,

“... now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.” (13:14)

Later Samuel gave Saul God’s marching orders to totally destroy the wicked Amalekites—to destroy all the people and all their livestock. God gave Saul the victory. *But*, Saul spared the king and the best of the livestock. When Samuel arrived on scene Saul improvised and said *the people* spared the livestock so they could sacrifice them to God. Samuel delivered God’s judgment.

“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.” (15:22-23).

Saul confessed his sin and pleaded with Samuel, but God’s judgment was final.

Each and every relationship in each and every day, in each and every issue and decision needs to be motivated by and grounded in *obedience to God*, to His truth in the Bible. Listen carefully: if you are not obeying God and His truth in any aspect of any relationship, *Stop*. Confess that sin to God. Start obeying Him.

The second motivation in which all our relationships should be grounded is to please God. Drop down to verse 20. “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.” Every relationship and every aspect of each relationship should be driven and measured by the desire to please God.

With our new perspective we should seek to know what God expects of us and to obey Him, but not “because I’m supposed to,” not “because I have to;” nor out of fear; nor yet in trying to earn His favor. Our obedience should come from a desire at the core of our being to *please* God—the desire to know that God is smiling on us as we define and build our relationships.

Two teenage guys were toying with doing something they knew was wrong, and would really upset their Dads. One finally said, “I can’t do it.” His friend asked, “Are you afraid your Dad will find out and hurt you?” “No,” the first boy said, “I’m afraid he will find out and it will hurt *him*.”

Each and every relationship in each and every day, in each and every issue and decision needs to be motivated by and grounded in your deep desire to *please God*. Are there some relationships, or parts of any of them, in which you know you are not pleasing God? If so, stop. Confess that sin to God. Start pleasing Him.

The third and final motivation in which all our relationships should be grounded is to serve God. In verse 23 we read, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men...” The specific context or point is work for a master or, today, for an employer. I should ask myself in all that I do in every relationship, “Am I doing this for Gōd? If the answer is no, then my motivation is not on target.

I need to clarify something here. Defining and building my relationships so that I am serving God in them does not mean that people can be my *projects*. We sometimes see that in witnessing. Some people develop a “personal” relationship with the only interest in the other person being that person’s salvation. If that other person does not seem likely to accept Christ, they drop them. And yes, sadly at times, no one could accuse us of having some friends as *projects* because we never get around to serving God by sharing Jesus Christ with them.

We also see this in relationships among believers. Some will develop a “personal” relationship with you, but if it looks like you aren’t going to support their idea, cause or project, they drop you.

Truly and ultimately serving God in our relationships never makes it right to feign friendship, or treat others as a project. Each and every relationship in each and every day, in each and every issue and decision needs to be motivated by and grounded in your deep desire *to serve God*.

Are there some relationships, or parts of any of them, in which you know you are not serving God? If so, confess that sin to God. Start serving Him. All of our relationships should be grounded in Christ, in Correct Motivations. Now let’s move to the relationships.

### **Your Relationships Should Be Grounded In Mutual Obligations.**

The statements we have here are not detailed. They do not cover all aspects of these relationships. These complimentary and mutual obligations are critical to having relationships that are in line with God’s perspective, that are grounded in Christ.

The first is submission and love between wives and husbands, presented in verses 18 and 19. The meaning of Paul’s opening statement, “Wives be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord,” has been discussed and disputed at great length.

- Some accept it at face value;
- others dismiss it, saying Paul got it wrong;
- while yet others limit it to the culture of that time;
- and some reduce it to respect or mutual submission.

This is not an isolated, one-time statement. In the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:22-24 Paul wrote,

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.”

In 1 Peter 3 we read,

“In the same way (that is, in the same way that Christ submitted to bearing our sins on the cross), you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

And, yes, in Ephesians 5:21 Paul wrote to the church as a whole that in their relationships they were to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” This is how people in the church are to relate to each other. It much along the line of Philippians 2 where Paul instructs us to “with humility of mind regard one another as more important than [our]selves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” This does not conflict with God’s call for wives to voluntarily be subject to their husbands.

And, in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This tells us that there are no gender, ethnic and social status differences at the cross, as Paul wrote a few verses earlier, in becoming “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” All are equal as persons, in salvation and spiritual life, although we have different roles and responsibilities in the home and church.

Briefly, Paul is talking here about God’s order for the family. In recognizing and following God’s order for families, a wife is to “place herself under” the leadership of her husband. It is not something her husband can “demand,” let alone try to “enforce.” The broader context includes that everyone should be in submission to God. As well, it is to be in a context in which her husband loves her—and we will turn to that in a moment.

It does not mean submitting to abusive, illegal, immoral or foolish behavior. One illustration of being creatively submissive and respectful in very difficult situation is Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. (You can check that out later.)

And while the form of this submission will vary from one couple to another, from one culture to another, it—submission—is a constant in God’s design for marriage. To reduce the word or concept to respect without submission is to distort how the word was used, just as reducing the word “head” to “source” without authority distorts that word. It is God’s design and standard. As Paul wrote, it “is fitting in the Lord.”

Now we move to the men in verse 19, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.” Yes, but what does it mean to “love” your wife? Let’s turn to the parallel statement in Ephesians 5, beginning at verse 25.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any

such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.” (35-30)

It is a continual, committed, sacrificial caring in motives, thoughts and actions for God’s best for your wife.

Think practically about this responsibility. If you have grown up around the church, this statement on love may sound like a well-worn platitude, or an ideal that would be nice...“*if only we were perfect!*” Each man is to love his wife as he loves himself (28).

Men, any kind of casual attitude here is dangerous. God calls you to voluntarily love your wife as Christ loved the church—not someday, not in some ways; but today, and in all ways. Ignoring or taking this lightly is disobeying God. Remember the apostle Peter’s words,

“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her *honor* as a fellow heir of the grace of life, *so that your prayers will not be hindered.*” (1 Peter 3:7)

The new, heavenly perspective for husbands and wives includes the mutual obligations of love and submission.

Next we move to the relationship of children and parents and the mutual obligations of obedience and encouragement which are to flow out of the motivation of obeying, pleasing and serving God. We begin with children. Verse 20. “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.” The parallel in Ephesians 6:1 says “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

This word “obey” originally meant to hear, to listen to; and so then, to follow, to obey what you hear. “Listen to and then obey your parents.” This does not mean ...

- that children are property or robots;
- that children cannot think on their own, raise questions and have serious discussions with their parents;
- that children have to agree with and like everything their parents say;
- nor that children should do things their parents tell them to do that are wrong according to God’s standards.

It does mean ...

- recognizing that your parents have a responsibility from God to protect, teach, guide and correct you, and that they are responsible to God for how they do this;

- it means that you are to show your submission to God by obeying your parents;
- and, as Ephesians 6:2 states, it means that you honor your parents — that is, actively, tangibly show your appreciation, respect and value for your parents.

Now we turn to parents and their obligation mentioned here to encourage their children. Verse 21. “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.” The parallel in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Now you may wonder why I refer to “parents” when our versions read “fathers.” With few exceptions, our English versions translate this “fathers.” That is how the word is normally translated. Sometimes, however, in the plural (as here) it includes both parents. One example is Hebrews 11:23,

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his *parents*, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”

This obligation is for mothers and well as fathers.

Parents, do not exasperate, do not provoke your children to anger. Do not agitate or frustrate them to be angry or to lose hope. Before some of you teens smile, note that just because you think your parents made you angry, that doesn’t mean your parents are responsible for you being angry.

Picture this. Your parents tell you to clean up your room and take out the garbage before going out with your friends. You don’t get to it. When you come home your parents confront you, and ... you are grounded. You may think, and even say, “*You make me so angry!*” *But*, while your anger is real, your parents did *not* provoke you to anger. They exercised sound, godly discipline. Now, if you had not been told to clean up your room before you went out, or there was no standing rule for you to do that, and you got grounded for not doing it, then your parents *would be* provoking you to anger.

The last part of Ephesians 6:4 gets to the positive part for parents as Paul writes “... but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” *Encourage* them.

These obligations of obedience and encouragement can be intimidating, but what God asks you to do, He will also enable you to do. *Your relationships should be grounded in Christ.*

The final set of relationships and mutual obligations flowing out of obeying, pleasing and serving God is obedience and justice between workers and employers. Paul addresses slaves and masters. None of us are slaves or masters over slaves. The truth, however, needs to be applied to us in our work relationships.

The workers and their obligation of obedience come first. Go to verse 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. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.” (3:22-25)

Now turn to the parallel passage, Ephesians 6:5-8.

“Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”

Both passages set out three principles or obligations for the work which we do for our employers. Our work is to be done sincerely, “from the heart” and heartily; not superficially or externally. Just over one hundred years ago Max Weber coined the term “The Protestant Work Ethic” from his sociological and economic studies. The part of his idea that stated we fulfill our duty to God by sincere, faithful, diligent work fits here.

Secondly, as we noted under motivations, our work is not just for our employer, but ultimately for God. We are to serve “as for / as to Christ.” Indeed, in a very real sense “it is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Then, we are to work knowing that God will evaluate and judge the quality of our work, and reward us accordingly. We usually think of this with respect to *ministry*, as in 1 Corinthians 3. But God’s evaluation and rewards are for all aspects of our lives, including our daily work.

Martin Luther King wrote,

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say, ‘here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’” —

which I would complete by adding, “because he is sweeping streets for the glory of God.” Be obedient, be dependable, sincere, hard workers.

Then Paul addresses masters or employers. Go to the end of the section, the first verse of chapter 4. “Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.” Employers have the obligation of being just in their relationship and treatment of their employees.

In Ephesians 6:9, “masters, do the same things to them [i.e., your workers obligations to you], and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

Employers are to be just, doing what is right, and fair, or doing that which is equitable toward their employees. They are not to mistreat them, or take advantage of them. They are to decide compensation, conditions and benefits or discipline on the basis of what is fair, without partiality. And, the Ephesians 6 statement tells us that employers are to fulfill to their employees the same obligations that their employees have to them.

### **Conclusion.**

This is some of what “*The New Perspective In Relationships*” looks like. All of *our relationships should be grounded in Christ.*

As you spend some time with God now, thank Him for the people in your life, the people in your family, church, work place, and the community. As well, begin to evaluate your relationships. Do you like what you see? More importantly, how much do your motives and actions in them line up with the truth of God we have seen today? Confess and repent from any motives and actions that are not as they should be. Commit to God that you will develop and build relationships with the new perspective, with His perspective guiding you, to God having His way in your relationships.

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