

## Colossians(6): The New Relationships in the Lord (Col 3:18-4:6)

### Introduction:

1. Good Morning, Brothers and sisters, peace with you! Give thanks to our Lord that I have the opportunity for preaching the Book of Colossians in the past three months. Today is the sixth sermon and the second to last of the entire series. The passage is Colossians 3: 18-4: 6.
2. We will continue from last time's passage, from the "new identity" in the last sermon to the "new relationship" in today's message. As it was said last time, since we have been raised with Christ, we should "seek the things that are above." Colossians 3: 1 "seek the things that are above" does not mean that Christians do not eat food in the world and do not care about the family and society. On the contrary, "seek the things that are above" means we should have the attitude as "Christ is seated at the right hand of God" as well as "Christ is the Lord" to face everything in our lives. The main point of our last sermon was this: "Christ is the Lord" became our value system, guiding our minds and actions. Today's message is to apply this main point to various relationships in society. So today's and last time's message are the two sides of one coin.

### **I. Because we are in the Lord, the relationship is different**

1. There are many roles mentioned in today's passage, including wife, husband, children, father, servant/slave, master, etc. We must first ask a question before we carefully study each exhortation Paul gave: How are these commands different from general ethics traditionally? Chinese Confucian ethics pay attention to "three Majors and five Normals": the three Majors are kings, husbands and fathers. King is head to the official, husband is head to the wife, and father is head to the son. Officials serve the King, son serves father and wife serves husband. If all three relationships are in good order and the world will be governed well. If the three orders are disorganized, the world will be chaotic. There are several explanations for "five normals", one of which refers to the five virtues of "Li Yi Ren Zhi Xin", and extends to the five main relationships: father and son have close relationships, husband and wife respect each other, The King and officials are loyal, young ones respect the elders, and friends trust each other.
2. Brothers and sisters, on the elaboration and exquisiteness, the traditional Confucian ethics is better than what Paul commanded here, so why should we spend time looking at Paul's teaching of relationships? The reason is obvious, I believe everyone must have guessed, that is, the three words of "in the Lord" in our sermon today. Paul's teaching, as well as all teaching in the New Testament regarding relationships, cannot be understood without the foundation of "in the Lord." Conversely, without the theological basis of "in the Lord," Paul's

teaching is no different from the ethical principles of the ancient Eastern and Chinese Confucianism, and it is even far less advanced than these civilizations.

3. Yes, the relationship is different, because it is in the Lord. What we are talking about today is not general ethics, but a new relationship "in the Lord". The foundation behind wives' submission, couple's love, children's obedience, parental encouragement, bondservant/slave's obedience, and master's fairness. The foundation behind all these is "Christ is the Lord". Without this foundation, husbands and wives are merely exchanges of benefits for each other's need, children are only investment products of parents, and servants are only tools of wealth for the master.

4. The foundation of "In the Lord" shapes our relationship from three aspects, bringing out the following three key principles:

1) Man was made in the image of GOD, not as a tool: in today's consumer-minded society, we can easily materialize relationships into tools. As just said, husband and wife become exchange of interests, children to investment products, and servants to wealth tools. "In the Lord" means that we have to look at the value of man in terms of his creation. Man was made in the image of God. The value of man is not how much benefit he gives you, but how he manifests the glory of God. Human value is determined by the creator rather than the market price.

2) Relationship is a purpose, not a method: relationship itself is a purpose, not a method for us to achieve our interests. The love of the Bible is toward others, just like the hymn we sing today, not insisting on its own way. Marriage is not for what looks good on the surface, childbearing is not for vanity, family relationship itself is the purpose, because the family is the group that can best reflect the image of "three in one," and even the church can also be seen as one type of family, called "God's family." Husband and wife, parents and children are all used to reflect the relationship between God and us in the Bible.

3) Christ is the master, and I am the bondservant/slave: Eventually, all relationships, family and personal, must give account to Christ. In the traditional Confucian ethics, although there is the concept of heaven, this "heaven" is not a personal being. Therefore, the relationship in Confucian ethics is that kings are definitely higher than ministers, fathers are higher than sons, and husbands are higher than wives. But in the Christian teaching, because of the foundation of "Christ is the Lord", there is never an absolute high or absolute low among people, 4: 1 "knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." The way we treat each other, one day we will give account to our Lord.

## II. Building the relationship according to God's will

1. Next, let's take a closer look at the roles mentioned in the scriptures. Interestingly, the command given by Paul was structurally similar to the so-called "household instruction" of Roman society at that time, and was discussed in the order of husband and wife, father and son, master and servant/slave; however, Paul's command was quite "counter-cultural". Paul intended to make these relationships testimonies of God's glory, so that people can see the beauty of this Godly group. It can also be said that this is a testimony naturally revealed by the families with the foundation of "Christ is the Lord."

2. Wives submit to your husbands: Some people may dislike this passage, but this feeling likely reflects a common mistake when we are reading the Bible, which can be called "introduction of foreign ideas". We infused the concept of women in the Chinese Confucian tradition with rules and regulations into the word "submit" in verse 18, so we thought that the "submit" in the Bible means submission without self and loss of autonomy. This so-called "submission" was offensive. However, submission in the Bible is a respect and support for the God-given role, not surrender, but fulfillment. The purpose of the wife's submission is to fulfill the God-given role of her husband in the home, that is, the head.

3. Husbands love your wives: Similarly, husbands have a corresponding responsibility to love your wives. Paul added a special sentence "do not be harsh with them" because he deeply understood the state of depraved man. In fact, Paul's exhortation to his brethren was more severe. Brothers should not be harsh with your wives; as fathers, you do not provoke your children. Another thing to add is that the two elements of love and submission are inseparable.. When you truly love others, you will definitely think and act for others' benefit and want to fulfill others. Ephesians 5: 22-33 is a great passage about Christ and the church from the relationship of husband and wife, but don't forget 5:21 "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

4. Children, obey your parents: Children should be obedient to their parents. There is no need for Paul to teach that. But we still have to be reminded that "obey" here must be seen in the context of the Bible. Ephesians 6: 1 is almost exactly the same as this verse, but with the addition of the words "in the Lord": "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

5. Fathers should encourage their children: Similarly, parents should encourage their children. Paul is using the opposite to say "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.". This is also a reflection of the social reality at the time, fathers tended to be excessively strict, which undermined the confidence of children. But conversely, let's not over-interpret "do not provoke your children", as if you want to accommodate everything to your children. The original meaning of Do not embitter is continuously degrading them. In

ancient society, children were often regarded as "incomplete people", so impatient parents (especially fathers) were often bored by their children's immature behavior, so they often belittled their children and cause them to be discouraged

6. Bondservants/slaves, obey your master: the whole passage is written in the most detailed section on the relationship between master and bondservant/slave, especially the responsibility of the bondservant/slave, there are as many as four verses. Paul was actually very concerned about the situation of the slaves at that time. One of his 13 letters specifically dealt with the relationship between master and servant, which is the The Book of Philemon. The Book of Philemon is short, but it concretely reflects how the gospel affects the relationship between people. In today's verse, Paul gives the servant with one reminder and two encouragements. Paul reminded servants to serve with sincerity of heart as if they were for the Lord. The first encouragement is that the servant will be rewarded, the second encouragement is the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done. Verse 25 is an interesting verse, because "that wrongdoer" can refer to servant or master. But comparing Ephesians 6: 9 makes it very clear: "Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master[c] and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him." And to be honest, how many chances can a bondservant have to be partial to his master? So verse 25 is an encouragement or comfort to the bondservant/slave.

7. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly: Although Paul's exhortation to master only has one verse, the theology behind it is very profound, and it is continuous with the entire Book of Colossians. Masters must treat their bondservants fairly, because "knowing that you also have a master in heaven." Masters and bondservants, husbands and wives, parents and children, have different roles and different functions, but one thing is the same/in common, all have the same master in heaven. 3: 1 says "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." 4: 1 says that the master and the bondservant have the same master in heaven. 4: 1 echoes around 3: 1, connecting Paul's entire ethical teaching. So Paul's ethics is the ethics of "Christ is the Lord".

8. Other relationship interactions: Finally, let's look at 4: 2-6. The entire passage extends from the relationship in the home to outside, and there are two types of outside relationships. One is Paul and his ministry co-workers, and the other is outsiders, meaning people who are not in God's home or in his own family. "Speech" is the focus of these five verses. Sections 2-4 discuss that we should continue steadfastly pray for Paul and his co-workers, being watchful in it with thanksgiving, so that they can clearly declare the mystery of Christ. Verses 5-6 are about our attitude towards communication with unbelievers. You will especially feel that there is a tone of evangelism here, for example: walking in wisdom and making the best use of the time (Cherish time, direct translation from original transcript is buy the time back, but a better understating is

to make the most of every opportunity ) to answer everyone. It should be known that it was only twenty or thirty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Paul 's time. The society at that time had many questions about these Christians. So Paul encourages the church to make the best use of the time, in a gracious attitude and wise manner.

Conclusion: New relationship of “joy in the Lord”

Instead of saying that Paul gives a series of commands here, telling us how to behave at home and to non-believers, it is better to say that Paul describes a beautiful picture that allows us to see how the face of a new group living in the Lord is. Finally, don't forget what we said last time. Christians live in the tension between the present and the future, the finished and the unfinished, we are on the journey to heaven. This means that there is always room for growth in our relationships. Sometimes our emotions are out of control and hurt the people around us; sometimes we lose patience and talk against each other. But our hope is not in our own strength to self-improve, but in the constant renewal by the Holy Spirit. He can finish what we cannot, as Philippians 1: 6 said, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”