



His Lordship in Your Station

Colossians 3:18-4:1

October 18, 2026

Turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3 in a very, very important, very practical section we're coming into, Colossians 3 verse 18 through chapter 4 verse 1.

I do marvel at the versification spread, here. Why chapter 4 verse 1 wasn't included as verse 26 of chapter 3, I don't understand that. But nonetheless, we have a versification issue that I'm not going to solve today, but we are going to do an overview sermon for the entire section we're entering into.

And in the following weeks, we're going to look more closely at each of the individual stations in life or the circumstances of temporal life that Paul addresses here in these verses. Let's just begin by reading that section, starting in Colossians 3 verse 18.

"Wives, be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against

them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children so that they will not lose heart.

"Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice as men-pleasers, but with integrity 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.

"Serve the Lord Christ. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Masters, show to your slaves what is right and fair, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven."

The formal name that's been given to that section comes from a term coined by Martin Luther in the 16th century. It's in his *Smaller Catechism* of 1529. He calls these instructions *Die Haustafel*, which means the *Table of Duties*. These are rules that he provides in his *Shorter Catechism* to govern social relationships.

So he expands the list, but gathers scriptural evidence and brings it to the fore in his catechisms, governing relationships

between pastors and church members, between governors and citizens, individual members of households, workers, young people, widows. And all of it, he concludes, is the outworking of neighbor-love: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is the outworking of neighbor-love.

There are three pairs of household relationships that Paul covers, as you see there, starting with the most intimate pair, the husband and the wife, and then moving outward in decreasing degrees of intimacy to the parent-child relationship and also the slave-master relationship.

But all three of these relational pairs, the marital, the parental, the economical, these are relationships of the home. They are conducted within the context of the household. Even slavery, slaves, even though they could be bought and sold in the marketplace, they were still in this time, in the first century and really from millennia before that, they were counted as part of the household. They weren't treated as free independent agents, workers for hire as in today's marketplace. Slaves were members of the house, members of the home, members of the household.

So to understand these three sets of relationships in a Christian household, wives and husbands, children and fathers,

slaves and masters, if there are any slaves in any of your households, bring that to elder attention. We want to talk about that.

But we do need to understand these three pairs of relationships in the household. We need to understand them, first, in their own context. We need to understand these relationships in New Testament times, as they were in New Testament times, before we boil down the principles and port them over to our own times and start applying them.

But the main observation that we need to make right from the start, we have to take note of the governing relationship that transcends and superintends all of our human relationships. It can't have escaped your notice as we read, but the governing relationship that transcends and superintends all of our human relationships is that that each one of us has with the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the Lordship of Christ that governs all of our relationships and all of our relationships.

And that's what Paul, when he summarized all that came before Colossians 3:17, he drew it to this summary. In that verse he said, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name," that is according to his will, according to his aims, according to his purpose, by his character, "do all in the name

of the Lord Jesus," Yahweh, Jesus. What follows that injunction in these nine verses are eight clear references to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

So guess who it is that is getting into your business? Guess who's inserting himself into your home life, meddling with how you parent your kids? Guess who's in the middle of your marriage, interested in how you treat each other? And he's able also to see the heart.

You say, does the Lord really care about these things? Well, evidently he does. I mean, if he sustains the minutest stuff of matter in the universe, virtually invisible to the human eye, as are the components of atomic particles, if he sustains those things constantly, then, yeah, he cares about you, too.

And he cares about your relationships as well, and he cares about how you treat other people in your life. He's concerned about seeing your marriage and your family sustained by his grace as well, and he uses you as an agent of his grace within the family.

In fact, the very parts of your body, including your mouth and your tongue and your mind and your heart are all to be

instruments of his grace to minister edification and love and care for other people. His grace is not for you to just swallow up and have good feelings. It's to pass through you, you being a conduit of his grace to other people.

So nothing is off limits to the concerns of the *kyrios*, the Lord, including how you spend the money that he allows you to earn, including how you use the time that he gives you, including how you breathe the air that he gives you to breathe.

Everything is given to you as a gift of his grace, and he expects a return for the gifts that he gives. Nothing is hidden from his omniscient gaze, including the way you speak to one another, including the thoughts you have in your hearts toward each other. All things fall into the purview of his comprehensive and universal Lordship.

So by virtue of creating it all, by virtue of sustaining it all, he is Lord of all, and he has every right to intrude into what you may regard as your own private life. When you understand the doctrine of divine omniscience, you realize that nothing is really private.

But as we're going to hear tonight out of Hebrews 4:13, "all things are naked and laid bare before the eyes of Him with

whom we have to do." Your life is not private to him. What you do, he sees. He knows.

None of us would have the privileges of marriage or family or work apart from the free gifts of his grace. And so we as Christians, we've been taught, we've learned, and we don't resent his intrusion at all. We don't even call it an intrusion. We call it care, providential concern, loving affection for us.

That's how we treat his visitation. That's how we treat his gaze upon our life. We warm to his omniscient gaze, his penetrating view into our lives, into our hearts. We long for him to know us, to see us thoroughly. In fact, we say with David, "Search me, know my heart; try me, know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me into the way everlasting." So we don't call his intrusion into our lives an intrusion. We welcome his presence, welcome it.

So today that's how I want to enter into this section, with kind of an introductory overview about the Lordship of Christ over our station in life. I want to enter into this with an introductory overview so we can later look at each of the constituent parts within the larger framework.

And my hope is that you see the relevance of this household code, this *Haustafel*, that you see the relevance to your daily life, and that you rejoice in the Lordship of Jesus Christ over your station, over your household, and that you truly delight in obeying him because obedience to the Lord's revealed commands in his Word: pure joy. It's pure joy for the Christian.

Anybody who recoils at the obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, you're either not a Christian, or you are malformed as a Christian, and you need to get your heart right and line up with the good use of his authority in your life.

We're going to conduct our little overview this morning in four stages. So we see the reason in Scripture for the prevalence of the household code because this comes up a few times in our reading. Earlier in Titus, you probably heard very similar instructions from Paul to Titus to the Cretans.

But we want to see the prevalence of the household code, understand its importance in the eyes of God, its relevance today, the excellence of these instructions. And we want all this to encourage our obedience. So if I give you four key words, you can jot these down, then we'll revisit them: prevalence, relevance, excellence, and obedience. Prevalence, relevance, excellence, and obedience.

As I said, we'll come back and fill in the details. We'll start with this one, number one, the prevalence of the household code, the prevalence of the household code.

If you've read through the New Testament, especially maybe many of you being familiar with Paul's epistles, then you know that Colossians 3:18 through chapter 4 verse 1, that's not the only place in the Bible that we find instructions like those, okay?

Paul wrote a parallel list of instructions in Ephesians 5:22-33, which is, we all know, fuller, more expansive than this one in Colossians. Just as a side note to that, to explain, Paul knew that the Colossians, that they would be able later on to read and benefit not only from the Colossian letter, but also from the Ephesian letter.

Paul wrote both of these letters, Ephesians and Colossians, at the same time. They're both prison epistles along with Philemon, which is one of the members of the Colossian church; but also he wrote the book of Philippians, also a prison epistle.

He wrote those during his first Roman imprisonment, in both Colossians and Ephesians, Philemon going to Philemon, but

Colossians and Ephesians as general epistles to churches. Those were to be circulated throughout churches in Asia Minor.

In fact, there's a lot of evidence that the letter to the Ephesians was a circular letter. But according to Colossians 4:16, Paul really intended the Ephesian letter to reach the Lycus valley churches, particularly the one of Laodicea, and to Colossae as well.

But we need to ask, why are these commands of Colossians 3:18-4:1, why are they shorter than we find in the letter to the Ephesians? Why do they come across with this kind of staccato-like, military-sounding voice of command?

Well, Paul knows first of all that the Colossians can fill in the details later, so he's not worried about their, their needing to expand on what he's teaching and what he's instructing right now.

For now, though, his most pressing need in writing the Colossian letter is to confront the false teachers and their false teaching that is destabilizing the church. And so he gets right to the point.

But back to our larger concern about the prevalence of the household code in Scripture. It's due to the practicality of all

true religion. That is to say that orthodoxy is not known only by our grand doctrines, our summaries, our creeds, our confessions. Otherwise, why wouldn't God just send an angel to recite creeds from the skies, just shout down doctrines, doctrinal truths, propositional truths?

Those things are important. The doctrines are beautiful. There's a beauty in the theological explanation and understanding, a satisfaction to our mind and our hearts, to understand fully what the Bible teaches in what it says.

But in its effects, in how it affects the mundane affairs of its people, orthodoxy has to be manifest in a transformed life. That is to say, all of theology, if it's true theology, all theology is practical, all theology is to be put into use.

So Paul intends the household code to take this high Christology, the supremacy of Christ, to take these doctrines into the home and into the home; first, take it into the family, into the marriage, into the economy of the household. Theology, yes, it's glorious on its own, and yet God is pleased to glorify himself when truth governs the church and is practiced by his people, starting first and foremost in the home.

When Paul instructed his apostolic delegate Titus about how to address the unruliness of the Cretans, an unruliness in a character that was legendary in the ancient world, I mean, that's pretty bad. I can tell you, though, that when I have travelled to other countries, the sins of our own country are also legendary in the same way. Hollywood has seen fit to broadcast our sins everywhere.

Nonetheless, the Cretans, legendary in their own time, Paul needed to command Titus to establish order in the churches by speaking the things which are proper for sound doctrine. And you heard over and over, he said, "Exhort them, reprove them." In fact, "Reprove them strongly, severely." Very bold charge to this young pastor to go in and deal with Cretan disobedience.

As you heard in Titus chapter 2 verses 1 to 10, he set forth commands that were very specific to every demographic in the church: older men, older women, younger women, younger men, slaves. All of them were to be commanded according to their station.

But these household codes are not unique just to Paul, as if this were just his axe to grind. Peter, too, also in a rather long section of his first epistle, chapter 2 verse 13 through chapter 3 verse 7, Peter commands Christians to keep their

conduct excellent among the Gentiles, and his intent in their excellent conduct is to pre-empt any unjust slander because it's overcome with good works.

He also wants their conduct to be excellent in good works as a testimony on Judgment Day, a testimony that will cause believers on Judgment Day to rejoice and glorify God because of what they have seen produced in them, but also is going to provide prosecutorial evidence to condemn unbelievers because they saw those good works, too, and did not repent.

Your day-to-day, your thought life, how you live, what you speak, what you do with your time, how you spend your money, how you, how you conduct yourself in your home and in your workplace, you know what, beloved? It matters. It really does. It matters.

What you listen to, what you watch, what you entertain yourself with, how you pass the time, what you choose to prioritize in your life: it matters. It's being watched by God, yes, but also by the holy angels, who see your life; by the Lord Jesus Christ, who is not only your great substitutionary atoning sacrifice, but he's also your great high priest. Don't grieve him by the way you live, by how you think. "Grieve not the Holy

Spirit," Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5. Don't grieve him, either.

But you know who else is watching your life apart from the holy Trinity, the holy angels? Believers are watching your life. Is your life an encouragement to them? What about those believers who are most intimate to you, maybe who are married to you? Those believers who are your offspring, what about them? What do they see? What about the believers in the church, who are encouraged by your presence or discouraged by your absence?

What about the unbelieving in your life, whether they're unbelieving in your home or in your extended family, or those who are your friends or coworkers? What do they see? "Keep your conduct excellent among the Gentiles," he says.

God's concern begins with domestic excellence, and his concern for this domestic excellence in the behavior of his people, it's not only a New Testament concern. As we know, it spans the entirety of Scripture.

As far back as the earliest chapters of Genesis, we see the first institution God created was the family. It started with the progenitors of every human family, Adam and Eve. He could have just made one and then hatched everybody else. He didn't.

He made two, male and female, brought them together, had them procreate and bring out the offspring of the human race.

What was his design? To create the very first unit, the most fundamental, foundational unit of social structure: the family. And that's been the case ever since, even in our world that tries to deny the importance of the family and the husband-wife relationship and tries to redefine male, female, redefine mother, father, deny that those things exist. Still, it takes a male and a female to produce another offspring. They can never get away from ontology and biology.

Nevertheless, we come to Adam and Eve, and we see the guilt of Adam's sin, called original sin, imputed to all of Adam's seed. And so the members of Adam's race are all born in sin. But even so, even in the curse, going back to Genesis 3, we see the consequence of sin. God cursed Adam, cursed Eve, and also cursed the serpent.

And it's in the curse on the serpent that God's interest in the family shows up yet again. Genesis 3:15, God says, "'I will put enmity between you and the woman.'" He's saying this to the serpent, who is the devil himself. "'And I'll put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed.'"

What is that, but again an interest in family and seeing and predicting a conflict that would exist perpetually between two different kinds of families on the earth.

The consequence of the rebellion of our first parents has affected every individual and family, and most immediately and tragically, starting with Adam and Eve's own family, as Cain murdered his brother Abel.

Hope was restored. God granted Adam and Eve, Seth, "gift of God." And in Seth's line, "Men began to call on the name of Yahweh." That is, they became worshippers. They were believers. They heard Adam and Eve's gospel, a gospel that they heard from God in the curse on the serpent in Genesis 3:15.

The consequence of that rebellion is severe, stark, and it's manifest all through the pages of Scripture. But if we scroll ahead to the Exodus, we see again God's interest in the family as Israel eats the Passover meal in Egypt, sacrificing one lamb per household; in the Law of Moses through the instructions that are passed from generation to generation through the household.

Moses' final sermon in Deuteronomy makes it very clear what has to be at the heart of every home; and you know this.

Deuteronomy chapter 6, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one." That term for, one, *ehad*, has to do with an essence; not an essence that's divided and made up of parts, but an essence that is singular. And thus he is spiritual and invisible. His existence is of himself, and it is his essence to exist. He is the living and true God. There is so much in that proposition, "Yahweh is one."

But immediately, that's to be lived out. How is it to be lived out? Moses says, "'You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.'" Pretty comprehensive. No other loves are to rival the love you have for God.

"'These words which I'm commanding you today shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them,'" here it is, "'you shall teach them diligently to your household, to your sons, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up."

"'Bind them as a sign on your hand. They should be as phylacteries between your eyes, and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.'" Your individual houses, but collectively in the gates of your town and your city, let your town be known by my Word.

I'm not going to take you through every single passage, but there's a very real sense in which the rise and fall of Israel and the entire history of Israel with all its successes, all of its failures, it has to do with the devotion of Israel's households, the lack of devotion to the love of God, obedience to God, faith in God.

After God established Israel in the Promised Land, after he established the Davidic dynasty, there was a tragic fall of Israel as we see portrayed in Scripture, recorded in Scripture, their fall into unbelief and idolatry and rebellion, swallowed by this predicted exile, not just predictable because of the consequences of sin, but because God actually sent his prophets to tell them. He's predicting, Unless you repent, I'm driving you out of this land. Even in the predicted exile, God promised restoration, gave them hope even in the midst of words of judgment.

But what had happened to the people? In no small measure, the household wasn't attended to. Those who were to lead in the household, they didn't do their job. And if they didn't do their job as leaders in their own households, well, you know where else they failed to lead? In the tribe and in the nation, in the kingdom itself.

Want to see where a nation goes? Look at the households, look at the land. How are kids being raised? How are they being reared? How are they being brought up? Is it to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength? Is it to guard and revere his Word? Is it to be attentive with their time and their energy, to listen to his Word, to take it in, to learn it, to grow and change?

We get insight into the sad state of affairs in Israel, the abysmally low ebb of spirituality, which was barely left at a flicker of fidelity to the truth, when we come to the final prophetic word of God in the Old Testament, which is found in Malachi, in fact, the very last verses of Malachi's prophecy.

It's got hope, but it also demonstrates once again the prevalence of concern for domestic affairs. Remember Malachi 4 verse 4, "Remember the law of Moses, my servant, even the statutes and the judgments which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel."

You say, Oh, you're preaching law; you're preaching legalism. What'd I just read? "Love the Lord your God." What does love indicate? It indicates a heart that's rightly aligned to God, which demands grace, doesn't it?

"Remember the law of Moses, my servant, even the statutes, the judgments, like I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel." Those are good commandments, good statutes, filled with wisdom, joy in rejoicing in the obedience and the practice of them.

And when that blessing falls from on high because God loves you and loves your life, and you've been walking according to his Word, and he's pleased with all those who fear the Lord, you know what comes then? Gratitude. And that gratitude leads to even deeper affection and joy and love that you pass on to your family.

So Malachi says, "Behold, I'm going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land, devoting it to destruction."

After that, the light of divine prophecy goes dark for four hundred years. And the message? Listen to my prophets, return to Moses. Heed God's prevailing concern for domestic affairs, household fidelity, fathers turning to their children; their sons, their daughters and children turning to their fathers for honor, respect, regard, learning. Believe God, trust him, worship him in the obedience of the faith.

But it begins first in the family. When Christ arrived on the scene, we know the story, he didn't beam down from heaven. He didn't descend on a chariot, riding the shekinah glory of God, and land in Israel and hop off the chariot.

No, he entered by a miraculous conception as the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, caused the Virgin Mary to conceive in her womb in a miraculous way, a miracle that was hidden from sight, that passes by virtually without notice to anyone in the public.

And then he's born in a natural, normal human way. He's raised in a normal human family. He's subjected to the mundane experiences of life in a normal home. You know the final summary of Jesus' early life before transitioning into his public ministry life? Luke writes this in Luke 2:51, that he went down from the temple with his parents, down from Jerusalem. He went with his parents, "he came to Nazareth and he continued in subjection to them." "Children, obey your parents" is illustrated in the life of our Lord.

I'm going to skip over much of what we could say, but just suffice it to say that in making the point about God's concern for the household, you need to understand God would have true

religion to be lived out in the intimate setting of the family, in the mundane, common issues of everyday life.

Domestic affairs matter to God, and they should matter to us, too, because this is where true faith is tested. This is where your profession of faith is proven, shown.

Oh, there are many who want to do great things for God, conquer great lands, win everybody in India for the gospel. What they have a real trouble doing is loving their wife every single day and raising their kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord every single day, and a wife showing loving devotion and obedience and submission to her husband, and children honoring father and mother and obeying their commands.

You want to please the Lord? You want to do great things for God? Do it there. Do it there. It is a great joy to live out his commands in the common, in the every day, fidelity in the small things in life, things that only God sees, things that aren't posted on the Internet, that will not show up on a YouTube page, that will not be the subject of any influencer or anybody who's going somewhere in life, in politics.

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Quiet, humble obedience, day after day, hour after hour, sometimes minute by minute, that's where it matters. That's where the Christian faith is lived out.

And so it's no coincidence, is it, when assigning men to the office of overseer, elder, pastor, a church must examine a man's home life, his household conduct. 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 one which we read earlier: "For if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" Indeed!

The same Apostle who wrote that is simply following the consistent testimony of all of Scripture for all of time: God will have his true religion lived out in the household. He will have it lived out before the watching eyes of the next generation, the impressionable eyes of our children, our grandchildren. What are they seeing? What are they hearing? What do they observe?

This is, incidentally, what connects these verses, this household table, back to Colossians 3 verses 1 and 2. We must "keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." We have to "set our mind on the things above, not the things that are on the earth."

How do we do that? Day by day in the household, day by day in the domestic affairs of life shared between wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters.

Now some today think that Paul has borrowed this household code and others like it from Greco-Roman teaching, philosophy, what was common in the culture. And it was common in the culture to talk about these things.

But they think that Paul took these household codes from the culture, and he Christianized it and repurposed it. But essentially, he's writing this whole section as an accommodation to the culture. And if that is true, we've got serious implications for the relevance of this section to our daily life. And in fact, that's how quite a few, I'd say the majority of professing Christians, treat these passages, as irrelevant to their daily life. I hope that's not us, right?

But let us consider secondly, number two, the relevance of the household code. The relevance. So we talked about the prevalence of the household code. Now the relevance of the household code.

It is true, you do find these same pairings in Aristotle, in his work on politics. You can find similar household codes in

the works of Seneca, Dionysius of Halicarnassus. You find it among Hellenistic Jewish writers like Philo, Josephus.

All of them use the same pairings that you find here in Paul: husband-wife, father-child, master-slave. Why is that? Because that's the household, because that's normal. That's life. It's not some big surprise.

But as some believe, they believe that similarity means that Paul has borrowed. And they always give preference to the culture around Paul, not to Paul. They don't say the culture borrowed from Paul. They say Paul borrowed from the culture, and then they proceed to suggest reasons why.

A popular view is that Paul borrowed these forms and follows the same structure as the culture to kind of allay the suspicions of the culture. That is, he needed to assure the culture around him and all these pagan places that he visited, he needed to assure them that Christianity is not a revolutionary movement.

It's not going to upend society, but it shares the common concern, just as they do, for family, to see family as a stabilizing social force, to reinforce the social fabric, contribute to the civic good. According to his view, Paul wants

to agree with that. He wants his people, his churches to show their agreement to that. And so he writes these instructions.

Now, where would anybody get the idea that Christianity is a revolutionary force in society? Well, unbelieving Jews perpetrated that lie to justify crucifying Jesus. He's flouting Moses, he's turning everything upside down. He's telling people he's going to destroy the temple. He's a social revolutionary; we need to put him to death.

Then they continue to perpetrate that lie to justify persecuting the early Christians, continue to propagate the view these Christians would turn the world upside down with their teaching. That's exactly what the Jews said in Thessalonica, Acts 17 verse 6.

So as some believe, Paul was trying in his letters to tread lightly so he could assure the Gentiles against the accusations of the Jews. He could assure them that this new movement is very pro-family. We vote the right direction. We vote for family values.

Also according to this view is that there is in one of Paul's earliest epistles, the letter to the Galatians, liberal scholars view the letter to the Galatians as one that represents

in Paul the purer, far more primitive form of Christianity. In fact, they believe that Colossians, Ephesians, these are spurious in their authorship, that it's not known who actually wrote them, and they certainly don't believe it's Paul.

But they believe Galatians, far purer, primitive form of Christianity, that Paul indeed had set forth a revolutionary principle, one that promoted such a radical equality, egalitarianism, would upend all the patriarchal structure of the ancient world in order to usher in a far more enlightened religion.

Paul was ahead of his time. It couldn't be accomplished in those ignorant, dark days. It awaited for, well, the enlightenment, and liberalism after that. What is this radical principle they're referring to? Well, Galatians 3:28, that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ."

So they say, reading into the Apostle a kind of their own enlightenment presuppositions and their own modern radical egalitarianism, they see Paul in that verse banishing all social distinctions, erasing all social hierarchies, just erasing it, saying this whole authority structure of authority and

submission in the home, that is *passé*, for “you are all one in Christ.”

So he is advocating, they say, in this pure form of Christianity and in the early epistle, unadulterated by additions from other scribes, that Paul is trying to reorder the home, society, and state in kind of a flattened-out form of a radical egalitarianism and equality. Nobody's in charge, everybody's in charge. “We’re all one in Christ.”

Theological, social liberals today, evangelical feminists of today, all see Galatians 3:22 as a paradigmatic text. It's kind of a new hermeneutical lens through which they are going to compare every other related concept in Scripture. All these household codes are compared and run through the grid of Galatians 3:28. And so they say Paul actually is a revolutionary.

Just to show you how this works, using Galatians 3:28 as their hermeneutical standard, they believe, like what it says in Ephesians 5:21 that's written just before the household code in Ephesians 5:22-33; but in verse 21 Paul says, “Submit to one another in the fear of Christ,” and remember after that comes wives submission to the husband, husbands love the wives and so on and so forth.

They think that that mutual submission means that sometimes wives submit to their husbands, but also husbands submit to their wives. Sometimes men lead in the home, and sometimes women lead in the home. That's been taught for fifty years at Fuller Theological Seminary, the flagship evangelical seminary, and many other seminaries as well. So it's really a free-for-all with leadership and submission.

And so they say when Paul is here addressing these household codes, such as we find in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5, he's really kind of just being shrewd, wise as a serpent. He's being calculating.

He just wants to see the Colossians and the Ephesians kind of give no assent to the sensitivities and the sensibilities of the unenlightened dark, pagan culture and pagan mind, basically telling them, Look, listen, church in Colossae, church in Ephesus, guys, look, we know that none of these categories matter any longer because in Christ it's all the same. We're all equal. There is no distinction. There is no authority-submission thing. It's all flattened out, so we all submit to one another, and everybody leads and everybody follows, and it's all one big happy, chaotic mess.

But lest we make these pagans suspicious, lest we offend their sensibilities and lose a hearing for the gospel, just go with it. Just conduct yourselves within the established social norms for now.

That view leads to the kind of scholarship that promotes what has come to be known as, maybe you've heard this term before, a "redemptive hermeneutic," which kind of sets the course of the culture on a trajectory, they say, toward the end of slavery. Because after all, slavery is written about in the passage we just read. And we'll talk about what Paul is saying and not saying in this section on slavery.

But they say this redemptive hermeneutic sets a trajectory in the Scripture toward the end of slavery, but also toward the end of male headship in the marriage and the end of female submission in the marriage, and really any restrictions on roles in life and culture and society at all.

By that same logic, using and applying this same redemptive hermeneutic, those who reject the Bible's ban on homosexuality and promote gay marriage, they have followed that same trajectory, followed that same hermeneutic. Look, if the Bible was wrong on slavery and it was wrong on male-female relationships, it's probably wrong on marriage too.

So it's been said Paul is not perpetuating the old male-authority model of an unenlightened culture. Men in charge of households, how barbaric; ruling over wives, children, slaves, as if this white male patriarchy is condoned, ratified by Scripture. No, they say he was shrewd. He knew that the fledgling Christian movement would fail if it was treated with suspicion as some kind of a revolutionary movement.

So according to this view, as a strategy for longevity and even as an evangelistic approach, Paul's, according to them, saying, Share the gospel but live by the norms of the culture. Even though you don't agree with it, even though we'll do away with it one day, leave the emancipation of slaves and women to future generations of more enlightened Christians. That's the idea.

What do we make all that? What do we make of all that? Is this whole section irrelevant? Should we see the household table is no longer relevant as, as being kind of formally or maybe informally revoked, perhaps outdated, outmoded, rendered to obsolescence?

Now it is true, as I mentioned earlier, that the household codes are found in Greco, Roman, Hellenistic, Jewish sources. However, as important as it is to see the similarities, that

there are pairs, wives-husbands, children-parents, slaves-masters, we see those similarities between the codes, it's far more important, far more relevant, to see the differences between them.

It's also true that Jews and pagans alike, they did see Christianity as revolutionary. But the real revolution was not in maintaining these role distinctions. It wasn't in calling a man a man and calling a woman a woman. It wasn't, that wasn't the problem. That wasn't the revolutionary thing.

The real revolution is, is the gospel itself, that God would send his son to take on human flesh and redeem a people for himself. That's revolutionary.

Maintaining structures of relationship, authority, submission, that's not revolutionary, and that's not what Christianity was doing. That promotes social order by adhering to God's good design. It's his institution after all. And whatever is said in the pagan culture to maintain that order, that's just self-preservation for any culture, any society.

But that idea started with God, the institution of family as the basic unit of the society. God did that, he made that. That's not new to Aristotle. On that, on the social structure,

the good of social order, the good of the family, on that, the world of that time and Christianity shared common ground. How I wish that we would return to that today.

If anyone at that time was promoting revolution, it was the false teachers, who really took bits of Christian truth and syncretized them with their pagan background, pagan error, philosophy.

And they promised everyone to liberate the individual and break away from social norms, even to buck the trends and the traditional roles of male and female and call it Christian. Really, what was in these false teachers was a spirit of self-will and anarchy, and Paul is trying to buttress the church against them.

If anything cast Christianity as revolutionary, it was its radical difference in the household codes and what was driving obedience to the household codes. And by this we see the excellence that was revealed in the biblical household codes over and against all else in culture and society.

So we come to a third point, number three, the excellence of the household code. The excellence of the household code. In trying to discover the origins of the household code and looking

into the historical background of the adjacent writings of the ancient world, some do find similarities and interpret those similarities as sameness.

But that's not true. If you look more closely, and you reason from faith with a view to obey what's written in Scripture, we see differences that really do demonstrate the excellence of the Christian household, the wisdom of God's revelation, and how he instructs us, and how he motivates us, how he invites us to participate in the truth, to obey it, to practice it in the most intimate setting, which is the domestic life.

Several points of excellence distinguish the Christian household over the non-Christian household. I'm going to give you five of these. First, we're motivated to obey by the good governance of the Lord. We're motivated to obey by the good governance of the Lord.

What is governing us is not what we passively observe in nature, which is what the philosophers were doing. It's not discovered by natural observation, what's been reasoned out from nature. That's what you're going to find in Aristotle, Seneca, and all those other philosophers.

What governs the Christian is an external authority, but not an impersonal authority like nature is. What governs the Christian, his authority is a personal authority. It's one with whom we have a relationship, he who is called the Lord. In him we exist, by him we have life, and through him we're reconciled to God.

And no doubt you noticed when we read the text how many times Paul refers, to the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, eight times in nine verses. What's motivating our obedience is in reference to the Lord Christ, which puts our obedience and our motivation for doing what's written here on a plane far above any other philosophy and religion ever known to man because it's revealed by God.

Peter O'Brien says, "The commands are furnished with the motivation in the Lord, and so the readers are admonished as is proper in the Lord, verse 18; and "for this is pleasing in the Lord," verse 20. Paul reminds them of "the fear of the Lord," verse 22. Their conduct is regarded as "done for the Lord," verse 23. References made to the Lord's judgment, verses 24, 25, chapter 4 verse 1, while they're admonished to "serve the Lord Christ," chapter 3 verse 24.

Over and over, everything we do is in reference to the Lord. It's a vertical thing for us, not a horizontal thing. Paul is appealing to the Lordship of Christ as the motivation for obeying the household code, and the excellence of the personal, omniscient governance over the individual's behavior within households.

Man, that can't be overstated. When Mom tells you to clean your room, young person, and then she goes off for a shopping trip or to run some errands, you know what governs your heart in that moment? The fear of the Lord, or the desire to do whatever you want. And it doesn't change all through your life. That's always going to be the issue. That far exceeds any written law code, any law written to man. If it's from the heart, that far exceeds.

Second, we're motivated to obey by the sovereignty of the Lord, by the sovereignty of the Lord. In the Greco-Roman mind, what motivated the adherence to household codes, it's kind of just altruistic, what nature reveals and what therefore is most fitting.

F. F. Bruce writes this, he says, "If the Stoic disciple," which had their own code like this, but "if the Stoic disciple asked why he should behave in a particular way, his teacher

would no doubt tell him it was fitting because it was in conformity with nature. When a Christian convert asked the same question, he was told that such behavior was fitting in the Lord."

We wish people today would abandon their sophisticated form of cultural suicide, and at least return to what nature itself teaches them; that they distinguish between men and women, that they acknowledge the most fitting male-female roles, principles of authority and submission, all that is good and fitting and in comportment with nature itself. We wish that would be the case.

But nature alone, as we see and have evidence all around us, is no sure guide for our ethics or our morality, is it? Rather than submitting to the sovereignty of impersonal forces in nature, lessons we can learn from the world around us, the absurdity in the non-intellect of nature, it's to command our intellect, governs our wills. There, there is no overt lesson principle from nature that governs the heart.

The Christian is motivated by an intelligent, sovereign Lord. This Lord who is nature's creator, the one who made the heavens and the earth; this creator is the Lord our Lord. He's the one who sovereignly determines our station in life.

So if you're a wife, you're a woman by the Lord's choice. You've been blessed with the gift of a womb, that life would grow inside of you and produce offspring, bring in the next generations. What a gift. You're a wife by his choice. You're a woman by his choice.

If you're a husband, you're a man by his choice. You have a wife by his choice. Now, I'm looking around at some of you. You need to be thankful you have the wife that you have by his choice. The fact that she was blind to you: clear evidence of God's grace and kindness.

But on and on it goes, right, right down the line. Children, don't complain about your parents, the family you're born into. Parents, especially you, don't you dare complain about your kids. They came from you, you know.

But it's by the Lord's sovereign choice that we have the relations that we have, that we're in our various stations in life. Each one of us is going to render to him an account of how we have stewarded the station that he chose for us. He is sovereign. That motivates us to obey.

Third, we're motivated to obey by the good and wise providence of the Lord, by the good and wise providence of the

Lord. We don't hold to a deistic view of the created order, that the Lord created all things as if he's a watchmaker and he wound it up and then pulled back and just let it run. That's deism, that's not Christianity.

The Lord who sovereignly governs us is the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. He created and he sustains all things actively at all times. He's in it all the way, thoroughly. In fact, he entered the fallen world with us, lived with us, walked among us, indeed took the worst of us, our sins, on himself. He died for us, died in our place.

He couldn't have become more involved than he did. The Lord Jesus Christ himself, risen from the dead, ascended to the father's right hand. He keeps watch over us, and he intervenes in the stuff of our daily lives, providentially directing all things, no matter what station we're in. He sovereignly governs us according to his perfect wisdom for our good, to sanctify us, care for us, love us, shepherd us. It's his providence, shepherds us safely to his kingdom.

Fourth, we're motivated to obey by the conscientious care and love of the Lord, by the conscientious care and love of our Lord. It's notable in the household code that Paul addresses, first, the one under authority, the wives, the children, the

slaves; and then he addresses the one in authority in that pair, the husband, the father, and the master.

This is acknowledging, isn't it, the essential equality of each one, but at the same time, he does not obliterate God-ordained differences among us, choices that he made in our station, the roles he assigns to each one of us. He preserves both: essential equality and distinction and difference in role. Both are good.

But this is, to address the one under authority, according to the ancient world, this is truly revolutionary. None of these Stoic codes, Aristotle, none of the philosophers addressed those under authority, didn't speak to them. Slaves by Aristotle were called animate tools. What does a tool have to say to anything? A tool just needs to shut up and turn the screw and hammer the nail.

Not Paul. Paul writes to the children, the women, the slaves, as if they had a choice, because they do; as if they have a free will to exercise, as if they have a decision in the matter, because they do.

"First-century household codes were inflexibly patriarchic," as Douglas Moo says, "reflecting the Roman

household pattern, according to which the husband, father, slave-owner, that is, the *pater familias*, exercised *patria potestas*, that is, paternal power over the household."

You know what that means? In extreme cases, this *pater familias*, the father, he could exercise the power of capital punishment should he so desire. That's obviously not what the New Testament teaches, not at all, but that's revolutionary: to address those under authority.

What's quite remarkable, considering the cultural context Paul addresses, he allows for Christian wives and children and slaves, in due consideration of righteousness, to disobey unrighteous commands from those in authority over them. We'll cover that as we work through these verses.

When a human authority clearly conflicts with God's truth, his divine authority, with Christian righteousness, those who are under authority may disobey those who are over them in authority. Be careful with that one. But that's exactly what Paul has set up, here.

The Lord is loving, kind, calling each of us to submit to his choice of our station in life, and he doesn't do it by external coercion or heavy-handedness. He does it appealing to

an affectionate desire that we have within us, by virtue of the new nature, to submit ourselves to his loving leadership.

On the other hand, the same Lordship that governs the speech and the behavior of the one in authority in the household reminds him of his final accountability. Each one is going to answer to the Lord Jesus Christ one day. He's going to measure out to each one according to his submission, his stewardship, his work.

This leads to one more mark of excellence, number five, we're motivated to obey by the command and the protection of the Lord. We're motivated to obey by the command and the protection of the Lord. This may be obvious for one under authority, who's nervous about submitting himself or herself to a fallible human being. But for the one who's given authority, it's a motivation as well.

Either way, the Lord Jesus is the only one fit to command the conscience, to command the obedience. In its deepest sense, it's to be a matter of conscience in relationship to Christ. For each one who's under the authority of another, for wives, children, slaves, submission to authority, obedience is an outwork of a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This means, for a husband to force the submission of his wife, that's not true submission. You may get an acquiescence. You're not getting submission. You're forcing her into some kind of disobedience by your coercion. It undermines the true fulfillment of the command.

By the same token, when a wife cajoles, demands, complains, manipulates her husband to love her in the way she wants to be loved, calling it his duty, that, too, undermines any sincere fulfillment of the command that is given to the husband for him from the heart to love his wife.

The command of the Lord Jesus is a loving command, and when we line up under his command and do his bidding, we do it for the reasons he gives. His protection is ever-present with us. And so with Augustine we pray, "Command what you will, and give what you command."

One more point, just a brief, brief point: the obedience to the household code. The obedience to the household code. And this is really where I want to challenge us as we draw this to a close.

We've seen the prevalence of God's concern about domestic affairs throughout Scripture, and it shows us the abiding relevance of these household codes for us today. And when we contrast the way a Christian is to live in the home-life, marriage, family, economy, we find it far excels anything we find in the world, ancient or modern.

We see the excellence of the household code in Scripture. And though we can say that the household code of Colossians 3:18 and following, Ephesians 5:22 and following, Titus, 1 Peter, the entire law and prophets, we can say with confidence that the household code in Scripture, how we conduct ourselves as Christians in our homes, it's not irrelevant, outmoded, outdated. It's not made obsolete.

This household code has not been revoked. And so ask yourself this question: Have you, by your own neglect, treated the household code in Scripture as a thing that's been informally revoked in your own life?

Is it a matter of abiding concern to you, daily concern? Or is it a thing of relative unimportance, a matter of indifference to you, what people see or don't see in your home life, your

marriage, your family, your work ethic, your productivity, your lack thereof? These are all things that either bring glory to Christ or reproach to Christ.

Paul's writing, here, to the Colossians. He's addressing them in their own context, but it's in every context. Showing the Christian religion to have real, practical implications over and against the culture, over and against all false religion; showing Christians to have real power to renew minds, save souls, transform lives; it's the true testimony of the grace of God.

We don't want our lives to bear a false testimony, do we? The best that the household codes of any false religion can do is to tell people how to cope with their issues; how to strike compromises with your spouse; how to manipulate your kids into some form of something that resembles obedience so that you can get them to school on time, get them to do their homework, do the chores. It's all designed to mitigate suffering, promote personal happiness, fulfillment.

The practical implications of Christian religion, that calls sinners to repent, it really does reverse the course of life. It really does change everything. It does radically, revolutionarily upend all that was once normal, comfortable,



what used to be natural to us. It reverses all of that as we walk in repentance, turn away from fallen instinct and natural habit and bad examples all around us.

To obey these commands that are revealed in Scripture is to put the practice of Christian religion into good effect and to put it on a collision course with the world that we live in. But it does demonstrate the salvation of God, the reality of his gospel manifest in a life changed, generations growing up to see that changed life from the home and lived out.

When Paul said in Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," small wonder isn't it, that he started with the home. For it's here that true religion is put on display, that the power of God is most clearly manifest. In its saving, sanctifying work makes the most difference for generations to come. Bow with me in a word of prayer.

Our Father, we want more than anything to, just in gratitude, in joy before you, we want to see your gospel completely change our lives, reorder everything. We, too, are emerging from an American Cretan culture.

We don't want to live that way anymore. We don't want, we're just seeing in our time the shattering of the family as families and marriages are ripped asunder and the consequences are with us to this day and will continue on for decades, because the devil has had his way to rip apart the domestic life.

We also realize that a lot of us have been put into positions, a lot of, many Christians come into Christianity with no examples from the home, with no understanding of right roles, right ordering, of submission and authority. We have so much to learn.

So we pray that you would be gracious to us, show us mercy, and let us, even in this church and every other faithful church, we pray that you would do a good work to order our lives aright in starting with the family life. And the family life starts with each and every heart, that we are ordered under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen.