

Christ in you...

The message of Colossians



Week 10: Upside Down Spirituality

INTRODUCTION – Upside-Down Leadership

Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17

DINE IN – Studying The Text In Context

Colossians 3:18-4:18

SUBMISSION: Relationships of submission and authority in the Christian home should grow out of the foundational *mutual submission* that undergirds all relationships between spiritual brothers and sisters (**Ephesians 5:21+**). As well, all practice of submission and authority is, for a Christ-follower, an act of service to our heavenly Master.

HUSBANDS & WIVES: Paul shifts the centre of gravity in his discussion of marital standards. Husbands are never called to “love” (Gk., *agapeo*) in Greco-Roman discussions of marriage. Paul is injecting a radical reorientation for Christian husbands to love as their marital duty (again, see **Ephesians 5:21+**). For a scholarly defence of egalitarianism in marriage, see <http://godswordtowomen.org/scholer.htm>.

SLAVERY: Points to remember: a) As women and slaves joined the new Christian movement in large numbers, the movement came under suspicion as an anti-Roman society movement causing relational disorders. Paul was a strategist regarding the best way to see the Christ-movement grow. b) Slavery in Paul’s day was not the ethnic reality of later European/American slavery. c) About 1/3 of the population in Greece and Rome were slaves in the first century. d) Being set free as a reward after years of faithful service was a genuine possibility for Roman slaves. e) Paul did challenge slavery, but not by encouraging social revolt. Instead he gave both slaves and masters the teaching and tools necessary to slowly transform their relationships from the inside out (see **1 Corinthians 7:20-24**). The fact Paul addresses slaves and masters as equal church members is unparalleled in any Roman group. f) There is a play on *kyrios* (Lord/Master) in this passage that helps remind slaves and masters that they are all subject to the true Master. g) There is a real relational drama being played out here between Onesimus and Philemon that takes priority for Paul over societal reform (see **4:9** and the book of **Philemon**).

PRAYER: Christian prayer can ask for things (usually for others), but is more so a way of expressing gratitude for what we already have. Paul asks for prayer, not that he may be released from prison, but that he might have opportunities to share the Gospel, whether in or out of prison. It seems that these prayers were answered (**Philippians 1:12-13; 4:22**).

WISDOM TOWARD OUTSIDERS: Wisdom is the skill of applying knowledge within the ever-shifting dynamics of relationships.

CONVERSATIONAL SEASONING: Whatever else is the reputation of Christians, our “grace” should be top of the list. Here “salt” probably refers to whatever appropriate seasoning a conversation needs to become a better experience for the other person. Salt makes things taste better in the right amount. Conversations with Christians should be “tasty”. Without salt, the Gospel may come across like being forced to swallow vitamins – good for you but unpleasant. With too much salt our presentations of the Gospel can become cheesy, manipulative, and just “too much”.

ONESIMUS: Run-away slave of Philemon who met Paul and is now a believer. Now Onesimus is returning to the congregation where his master, Philemon, attends. Oh, this is going to be interesting. For more background, see the letter to **Philemon**.

EPAPHRAS: Probably founded this congregation. His prayer for the Colossian Christians is something he throws himself into, like diving into a wrestling match (Gk., *agonizomai*).

NYMPHA: The host and possibly the leader of a house church. Most probably a woman (contra KJV which follows a variant manuscript that sees Nympha as a man).

FINAL GREETING: Paul would have dictated this letter to an amanuensis (secretary). He would then authenticate it with a personal hand-written greeting at the end.

TAKE OUT – Applying The Text In Our Context

TAKE OUT #1: RETHINKING LEADERSHIP...

Followers of Jesus are called to approach power in an upside-down fashion. When we are in positions of power or influence, the question we ask is how we can use our position to express Christ-like, servant-hearted love.

TAKE OUT #2: RETHINKING PRAYER

Christian spirituality is relentlessly relational. Prayer replaces meditation as the primary internal spiritual exercise, inviting God into the cracks and crevices of our psyche. The focus of Christian prayer is the Gospel and others, not our material needs.

When we rely on organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely on education, we get what education can do; when we rely on eloquence, we get what eloquence can do; and so on. I am not disposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place – BUT when we rely on prayer, we get what God can do.
~ A.C. Dixon (1854-1925)

TAKE OUT #3: RETHINKING EVANGELISM

Christian evangelism should be enjoyable for *both* parties – the evangelist and the evangelized. If people hate it when you talk about Jesus, something needs to change. Either they don’t have ears to hear and so you need to stop, or your approach lacks seasoning and needs to change.

TAKE OUT #4: RETHINKING CHURCH

If Christian spirituality really is relentlessly relational, then church life is not just an auxiliary support mechanism for people who need it, but is at the heart of Christian expression. We express our faith in Christian community first, modelling an alternative way of living to others who are interested. Today, different churches offer different ways of doing this. At The Meeting House, we offer Home Church. Are you connected?

CONCLUSION – NEXT STEPS

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| A) Investigate Further. | D) Commit To Christ / Get Baptised. |
| B) Join A Home Church Community. | E) Sign Up To Serve. |
| C) Talk To Others About Jesus. | F) Invite A Friend To Church. |

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. Have you ever presented the gospel to someone? Talk about your experience.
2. After reviewing the message, discuss what most challenged or encouraged you.

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

3. Read our key text (**3:18-4:18**). a) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? b) Do you tend to work harder/better when being watched? How could Paul’s counsel in **vv 22-23** change your mental reality when working? c) How do you tend to pray? How could your prayer better align with the New Testament approach?
4. LET’S ROLE-PLAY! Recall the four-fold rubric for presenting the Gospel as the Good News message that God became one of us to SHOW us his love, SAVE us from sin, SHUT DOWN religion, and SET UP his Kingdom (his new way of living in community). Try presenting the Gospel to someone who says, a) I don’t think God could love me; b) I’ve screwed up too bad for God to care; c) I’m spiritual, but I’m not into religion; d) I just feel disconnected and directionless these days.
5. ROLE-PLAY – ADVANCED EDITION! Now try to season your conversation appropriately with someone who says: a) I love God, but not the Christian God – he hates homosexuals. b) Church is a crutch. I have my private spirituality and that is all I need. c) I’m digging Eckhart Tolle and I’m tracking with Oprah. How about you? d) The Bible is a bigoted book of violence and intolerance. It encourages war, slavery, and misogyny. ... Invent your own role-play scenarios.

SO WHAT?...

6. We made it to the end of Colossians. What have been your learning highlights during this series (e.g., favourite passages, lessons, or challenges)?
7. Pray for each other, that you will proclaim the Gospel clearly, as you should (**4:4**).

Bruxy Cavey @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, April 13, 2008