

Complete: Navigating Earthly Responsibilities as Heavenly Citizens

Colossians 3:18-4:1

There was a monk who lived from the year 390 to 459 named Simeon the Stylite. Why was he called “the Stylite”? It has nothing to do with clothing choice. The Greek word style means pillar and Simeon lived on top of a pillar for 36 years. He began with a 10-foot pillar that measured about 3 feet by 3 feet at the top and eventually moved to a pillar around 50 feet high with a guardrail to keep him from falling off. Why did he do this?

He had already locked himself in a hut for a year and a half and fasted for 40 days during that time. Word started to get out that there was an extremely devoted monk and crowds of people started showing up for prayer and advice from him. Eventually he didn't have as much time as he wanted for his own private devotions and so he found the 10-foot pillar and earned his nickname by living this way for the next 36 years.

There's almost always been certain Christians who believe that the most devout and most holy will separate themselves from earthly society and mundane responsibilities so they can attend to “true spirituality”. If we aren't careful this mentality can get into us a little bit where we start to think of spiritual life as one thing expressed on Sundays in worship and when we read our Bibles and pray and witness. And then earthly responsibilities and life are just something we sort of have to do, but they often get in the way of true spiritual life.

A few weeks ago we studied Colossians 3:1-4 and if you interpret this passage wrongly, you could end up going down the same road as Simeon, although hopefully not as extreme. These verses are telling us to set our minds on Christ and not the earthly sins described in verses 5-11. But the consistent teaching of Scripture is that we live out our faith BY participating in earthly life and mundane responsibilities.

Think of how much of your time is taken up by simple and normal human tasks. You get up, get ready, talk to your family, go to work, eat lunch, work some more, head home, eat dinner, play with the kids, work in the yard, watch a TV show or

read and then go to bed so that you can do it all over again. Now I want you to think of how much of the life of Jesus was spent doing normal human things. We don't know much of anything about his first 3 decades of life. What was he doing? Working, eating, sleeping, spending time with friends, praying and studying Scripture sure, but lots of other normal human things too. The incarnation affirms for us the goodness of human life in all its ordinariness.

And in our passage today Paul is going to help us see that participating in typical human responsibilities is good and that we ought to do this as those who are new in Christ. Paul is taking the thought of Colossians 3:9-10 and now making specific application to some key earthly obligations. So, here's what we will see in Colossians 3:18-4:1. **3 Areas of Earthly Responsibility Shaped by Our Heavenly Identity.**

1. Marriage (vv. 18-19)

Before we get into the details of this first area, I want to show you how this is structured and how Paul motivates us to live out our new identity in Christ in these areas of responsibility.

In these verses there are 3 sets of people. You get two sides of each relationship and both sides are impacted by Christ and our new status in Him. Look at the beginning of verses 18 and 19. Now look at the beginning of verses 20 and 21. And now look at the beginning of verse 22 and 4:1. Each set, including servants and masters, would have been a part of the typical Roman household. So a list like this outlining responsibilities for each group would have been standard during this time.

But what's unique about this list is how it is motivated by our new identity in Christ and not just be maintaining order in the household. Look at all the ways that Paul ties our actions to Christ. Let's glance down through the passage. One author explained how significant these motivations are like this:

The Stoics (who provide some of the closest pagan parallels to these household lists) based their teaching on the law of nature: this is the way the world is, so this is how you must live in harmony with it. Paul bases his on the law of the new

nature: Christ releases you to be truly human, and you must now learn to express your true self according to the divine pattern, not in self-assertion but in self-giving. - N.T. Wright

You can see the change that Christ brings. It's no longer about me, but instead about the other person. And you see this change in a monumental way in marriage. Look at verse 18.

This sort of instruction from Scripture is often a struggle for people in our culture today. And there's no doubt that many Christians have used and abused this idea of submission. And yet, God has given us an order to the home for our benefit. The idea of submission is a voluntary following of another's leadership. It's ordering myself under another. Does this mean that the husband holds all the cards in the relationship and the wife is a doormat? Well, unfortunately it has been used that way and it's vital that we don't read this verse without its companion instruction in verse 19.

The idea of submission implies leadership on the other side. What does that leadership look like? Listen to how Paul puts this elsewhere in Ephesians 5:25. Husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church. What does this look like?

You love her by sacrificing for her benefit and good. The relationship is not all about you. It's not about your goals, desires, and will. It's about you exercising your leadership to promote the good and wellbeing of your entire family, and your bride in particular. If someone has to give up the weekend trip let it be you.

Wives, if your husband lived like this and it was clear and evident that he was giving of himself for the good of everyone else, I bet it would be quite natural to follow a leader like that. To order yourself under him in that sense.

I have to tell you that often when I've heard teaching on this over the years it's with a lot of heavy emphasis on wives submitting to husbands, and shocker, it's from men. Often it's presented as the only problem in marriages is that women aren't submitting. This often betrays that these men are out for themselves. The shoe is on the wrong foot there. If the husband is to lead and the wife follow his

lead that means he bears the primary responsibility to set the culture and direction for the home. If that is true, it makes sense to me that we would press the primary load of this on him. So guys, what are you doing to lead, love, sacrifice, and cultivate the culture of your home to be a place of genuine love, affection, peace, and grace? What are you giving up for your wife? What are you doing to see her succeed?

This is the point where our new identity in Christ shines brightly and makes a massive difference in the marriage relationship. No other list of household obligations mentions the husband's obligation to love his wife as verse 19 does. In Roman culture the man was the head and ruled over all. He could basically do what he wanted to maintain order in the house. But all of that changes in Christ. Even though husband and wife have different roles here, Paul puts them on equal footing in Christ by instructing both.

So, what does this functionally look like in daily life for the husband to lead and the wife to follow his lead? Does this mean he must be the primary breadwinner? That he has to do the budget and money? That he makes all the decisions? The Bible gives almost zero direct guidance on what this looks like in daily life. The reason for this is because cultures change and personalities are different in each marriage.

Christians can be tempted to assume an early 1900's American middle-class mentality where the woman doesn't work outside the home. But that culture is quite a bit different from almost every other culture in human history. In agricultural cultures both men and women work around the family farm. In many 3rd world cultures, the family lives upstairs and the downstairs of their home functions as a shop and the husband and wife run it together. You could go on endlessly showing how different cultures impact the marriage relationship.

Beyond cultures, personalities are different. We know a couple who run a missions organization that they started 30 years ago. He's a little more soft-spoken and quieter and she is an absolute bulldog and a strong leader. How in the world is he supposed to lead in that relationship? In some Christian circles she would be told to sit down and take a back seat to her husband even though neither is designed

to function that way. He exercises his leadership by recognizing her gifting and empowering her to be what God has designed her to be, and it's a beautiful thing to watch.

This is how good leadership works no matter the culture. Good leadership is sacrificial leadership aimed at the good of the other person. This is exactly what you find in Christ, and this is exactly what he describes in Matthew 20:25-28.

Good leadership is about initiative, purpose, and sacrifice for others. The manliest thing you can do this week is to stop being so self-centered. There's been a lot of discussion and debate in our culture over the last few years about what it means to be a man and how we define manhood. I get it that this is a reaction to the whole idea of toxic masculinity and so now we've got a reaction to a reaction, and no one can figure out what it means to function as a husband and man. You either have to dominate others or reject manhood completely.

I just don't think it's that hard to figure out from Scripture what the essence of manhood is. Look to Jesus Christ. He used His strength, position, and leadership to serve others by giving up Himself. It's that simple. He did not come to be served but to serve.

The beauty of this teaching is that it directs us back to the gospel and that is why Paul connects our transformed relationships to Christ throughout this passage as he deals with marriage, parenting and work. It's what we saw in Ephesians 5:32.

At the end of the day, marriage is about Jesus Christ and the way we act in marriage is meant to direct us to Christ and model Christ.

So, if you are married this morning, take a moment to lean into this vital earthly relationship. It's so easy to get comfortable and to let things slide. It's easy at times to emotionally and functionally disconnect and begin living on a pillar even when you live in the same house.

Start with Christ and let His work motivate you and empower you to give of yourself for the good of your spouse. Whether that means following his lead or intentionally providing sacrificial leadership. I'll end with a quote from Tim & Kathy Keller. *"Marriage is a major vehicle for the gospel's remaking of your heart*

from the inside out and your life from the ground up...The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.” – Tim & Kathy Keller

Let's pray.

2. Parenting (vv. 20-21)
3. Work (vv. 22-4:1)

Sermon Reflection Questions – 5/31/26 (Both Sides)

- Have you ever gone through a season where Sunday morning felt like your 'real' spiritual life and everything else felt like it was just in the way? What does that usually look like for you?
- The sermon opened with a monk who literally climbed a pillar to escape ordinary life. What's the modern version of that — the ways we subtly check out of ordinary responsibilities in the name of being 'more spiritual'?
- How does the incarnation help us to see the value in earthly life and commitments?
- Which mundane task do you most despise doing and why? What's one way you could see this task as an important expression of your relationship with Christ?
- What are the three sets of relationships given in Colossians 3:18-4:1?
- Paul connects every instruction in this passage back to Christ: 'as is fitting in the Lord,' 'fearing the Lord,' 'as serving the Lord.' Which of those connections hits home most for you in your current season of life? Why that one?
- The sermon made the case that the heavier burden in this passage actually falls on husbands, not wives. Do you agree with that reading? What's your gut reaction to it?

- We argued that a wife following her husband's lead becomes much more natural when the husband is genuinely giving himself up for her good. Have you seen that be true? What happens when it isn't?
- Think of a couple you respect. What does the husband's leadership actually look like in that marriage? Does it match the stereotype of what 'husband leadership' is supposed to look like?
- The sermon said the manliest thing a husband can do this week is to stop being self-centered. If you are a husband, what's one specific thing you could do this week to lead by giving rather than taking? For wives, what's one way you could better support or follow the leadership in your home?