

Big idea: What life looks like as God's mob do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father...

FCF: A wrong view of society

Application: Transformed lives

PRAY...

1. Hmmm...

'Let the peace of the Messiah control your hearts... Let the word of the Messiah dwell richly among you... And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him'.

They are wonderful commands and exhortations. As I hear them, I want to see how they are applied, what they look like in practice. And I immediately assume that Paul and Timothy will then show me what this looks like, in my life – my life as an individual.

Now, behind such a logical assumption is an understanding about society and who we are and what makes up society – the basic building blocks. That understanding is very clear – individuals are the basic building block of society, so show me what this looks like in my life as an individual.

So, imagine my surprise when I turn to verse 18 and read, 'wives', and then verse 19 and read 'husbands', and so on through to Colossians 4:1... The basic unit that Paul and Timothy address in

these succinct, even brief, commands is not the individual, but the individual IN community, IN relationship (REPEAT).

This is an important observation (the first of many) to begin with because it transforms the way we view ourselves, the way we view society, and the way we analyse so much that is presented before us through media. Moreover, it shouldn't surprise us as thoughtful readers of God's word. After all, this is how God created humans – remember the reading from Genesis 1:26-28? To be created in the image of God – who is 3-in-1, individuals in community – is to be an individual in community. Moreover, as the 'image of the Creator' (3:10) is restored on God's people, we are being restored to this understanding of ourselves, and society.

The second observation to make is the nature of this section. Unlike the passages we have looked at in the last few weeks – just look back at Colossians 3:12, and 3:1, and 2:16 – this passage does not have any 'connecting' words. It is succinct, brief, to the point – bang, bang, bang...

We need to consciously place a passage like this in its context (like we do every passage). But the absence of connecting words should not lull us into considering these commands in a vacuum – they exist in a context, and that context is the one I referred to at the start – 3:15-16, and 3:17. I think Paul and Timothy are helping us to see what it means to have 'the peace of the Messiah rule in our hearts' (remember that last week we saw that this was the restoration of the fullness of God's design?) and the 'word of the Messiah dwell richly among us' and for every part of our lives

to be lived 'in the name of the Lord Jesus'. These verses are an application of those verses.

The third observation emerges from this – please pay attention to the frequency of the 'Lord' language in these commands. There are seven instances in nine verses. This is not a list of commands that are moral nor are they a checklist for good behaviour. This is a statement about walking with Jesus as Lord – remember Colossians 2:6-7?

Which, and this is the fourth observation, is where our surprise at their focus comes in. In our world (our time and age), if you were to apply Colossians 3:15-17, and walking with Jesus as Lord, you would do so to either individuals OR communities, because that is what we think are the basic units of society. But that is not what Paul and Timothy – God – do. They expose God's basic unit of society – the individual IN community/relationship – and apply these verses to them. Each of these 'individuals' are IN community – a woman cannot be a wife otherwise, and neither a man a 'husband', and so on.

The fifth observation flows out of this – there would have been no other community existing at that time – or since, which was made up of such individuals. Here is the application of Colossians 3:11- these people gather in one mob because Christ is their Lord! Alike, they were mired in sin, enemies of God. Alike, Jesus lived and died and rose for them. Alike, by faith, 'his story is now their story'. Alike, they have been transferred and transformed. Alike, they sit together as God's mob – and they are unique. In the Jewish synagogue, women, men, and children never sat together

– here they do! In no setting in the ancient world did slaves and masters sit together as equals – here they do!

Moreover, and this is the sixth observation, the historical circumstances add some colour and substance to such observations. The mention of Onesimus in Colossians 4:9 raises the connection between this letter and Philemon, which focused on the same Onesimus: an escaped slave who had become a Christian, a fellow ‘faithful and loved brother’ of Paul and Timothy. The letters of Colossians and Philemon were hand-delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus to God’s mob in Colossae – can you imagine the stillness as these two delivered the letters to the gathering of God’s people and they were read, with an escaped slave delivering the correspondence of the great apostle, to the gathering where his former master was seated! As we said in our series last year on Ephesians, this allows us to see these commands and exhortations in their truly radical context – and to see that children heard these commands read to them, just as slaves did, and wives, fathers and parents.

As we turn to these commands, let me encourage you to think through how these six observations might encourage you as you read the Bible, in particularly in HOW you read the Bible. None of these observations are especially deep nor are the necessarily obscure – they are a matter of quietly and deeply reading the Bible. Let me encourage you to think deeply on HOW you read the Bible as much as DO you read the Bible.

Along similar lines, let me encourage you to think hard about how such reading will help you consider – from the perspective of God’s revelation – the society and world we live in. Take the basic

unit of society that we have just discovered here – the individual IN society. Such a ‘basic unit’ discovery can be used to examine, and consider, everything from political parties and their philosophies and policies through to the thrust of protest movements, even the way in which social media works. For example, when a Prime Minister who has always led a party that espouses the role and worth of the individual suddenly advocates, and implements, a policy that emphasizes the responsibility of the community for those disadvantaged by a pandemic, what has happened, what has changed, how do we view the basic unit in our country? And we could – and should – do the same consideration at every level of our society, Biblically and thoughtfully.

2. Individuals IN community

With these six observations in mind, let’s turn to these commands to ‘individuals IN community’...

(i) Wives and husbands (vs.18-19)

Look at verses 18-19... READ...

The commands given here are not complicated – the language is clear and the commands are clear. We do not have licence to dismiss these commands, by playing them off other verses (like some do with Colossians 3:11). Instead, Paul and Timothy are remarkably consistent here, matching what is said across others of their correspondence to others of God’s mob in other places.

These commands, too, operate against the backdrop of both the Fall – the coming of sin into the world and the way in which it

broke this world and these relationships and the curse of God's judgement that came at that moment (remember Genesis 3?) – and the work of God to restore the fullness and goodness of his design under the Lordship of Jesus. In this sense, we must read these commands as restoration commands, restoration of the peace of the Messiah that rules in our hearts.

Wives are to 'be submissive to your husbands'. This is 'fitting in the Lord' – a matter of both walking with Jesus as Lord as well as the restoration of God's design established in Genesis.

At this point, it is worth remembering what we learned about this word 'submit' last year as we looked at Ephesians. It is not a statement of value or worth – all humans are made in the image of God. It is a statement of role, of order, within God's design. In this sense, it can be applied to the one and only Son of God as he 'submits' to his parents (Luke 2:51), people who are made in his image, by him!

In this sense, Biblical submission is the willing entering into the order created by God. It is to voluntarily enter into God's good design, established in creation. And this is 'fitting', as a statement that we walk 'in the Lord'.

Husbands are commanded to 'love your wives' and 'don't become bitter against them'.

We don't grasp the revolutionary nature of this command, because we have marinated too much in the juices of our world. There is no other 'household list' in the ancient world that makes

such a command – after all, wives in those lists were regarded as possessions, not image-bearers of God! But, in God’s mob, where individuals exist in community, husbands are to treat their wives as ‘image-bearers of God’ – and to love them.

We have already seen what this love looks like – remember Colossians 3:12 and Colossians 2:13, where love is Jesus dying for his enemies who are dead in their sins, so that they could be granted forgiveness and life that they did not deserve?! God’s people are transferred and transformed by such love, and husbands are to display such love towards their wives.

Moreover, as they enter this relationship, they do so willingly, and as beneficiaries of God’s grace, his undeserved generosity. This means they, too, must display that to their wives. This is a mutually beneficial relationship, not a millstone or a set of handcuffs or a limit on your nature as a human being or man.

As with the other relationships, it is important to see that Paul and Timothy do not encourage wives and husbands to look after their spouse’s responsibilities – they are to seek their own responsibilities. This is not a passage of rights (‘I deserve to be submitted to’, ‘I deserve to be loved’) but a passage of responsibilities as we ‘walk in the Lord’.

In each of our marriages, this will look differently – after all, some of us have children and some have no children, some are raising children and some have children raised, some are working, and some are retired. But, let me ask wives and husbands three simple questions:

(i) Wives, how can you submit to your husband's leadership in a way that encourages him to lead the family in a way that is 'fitting in the Lord'?

(ii) Husbands, how can you love your wives in a way that enables your marriage to display the self-sacrificial love that Jesus has for his mob?

(iii) Together, as you live as individuals IN community how can you talk, live and walk in a way that holds God's design as good and full, rather than belittle, degrade and deride it?

(ii) Children and fathers (vs.20-21)

Look at verses 20-21... READ.

I am continually amazed that children are addressed directly in this letter – this is not information given to parents to pass onto children – this is a command read directly to children IN the gathering of God's people.

The command to children mirrors the one to wives – but the key difference is 'obedience'. Unlike submission, which is willingly entered into, obedience is not optional. Now, before I go further, let me clearly state that this does not condone or allow abuse, violence, neglect or obedience to ungodliness (REPEAT).

At this point, the reasoning given ('for this is pleasing in the Lord') should remind us that these commands are in the context of Colossians 3:15-17 – and they reflect on the name, reputation and

interests of Jesus – as well as the restoration of God’s good design in all its fullness!

Fathers – and the term is used for parents in Hebrews 11:23, so this deals with parents more generally – are given a clear command, too – ‘do not exasperate your children’.

The role of parents, as we heard in Deuteronomy 6, is to parent their children (who are little image-bearers of God) so that they meet God as he truly is. For God’s mob now, this means introducing children to Jesus as we have experienced him – as the Lord of all things, the one who by grace has granted forgiveness to his enemies, life to the dead, transfer and transformation. This is the primary job of the parents, not a role to be outsourced to a youth group, to a Sunday School, or even to the wider church community (although they might play a role). And, the currency of such parenting is grace – and grace never exasperates!

Moreover, such parenting is so children ‘won’t become discouraged’. To put it bluntly, such parenting is to present Jesus before children in such a way that they do not become discouraged by life, disheartened by the burden of goodness or legalism, and delighted by the greatness of Jesus’ grace.

Let me ask children and fathers/parents three simple questions to apply what we have just heard:

(i) Children, how can you obey your parents today in a way that shows how good and great Jesus is?

(ii) Fathers/parents, how can you parent your children in such a way that they meet Jesus as he is – the Lord of grace?

(iii) As fathers/parents and children, how can you live publicly (and privately) in such a way that draws attention to how good it is to live with God's design restored to its fullness?

(iii) Slaves and masters (3:22-4:1)

Look at verses 22-4:1... READ.

Slavery has received much attention in this passage, and others within the New Testament. The immediate context – and this adds some significant feeling to this passage – is the conversion of Onesimus (a runaway slave) and his return to Colossae to deliver this letter, and Philemon, to his former master. It is a remarkably poignant image. Moreover, it is against the backdrop of slavery as a massive economic machine across the Roman Empire and not the race-based slavery that we have become so familiar with. This is a far more significant economic situation – the majority of wage-earners were slaves. In this sense, it is more akin to our work situation, but not completely equivalent.

Slaves were side-by-side in dignity and value in church (remember Col.3:11?) but remained in an ordered economic relationship. They remain slaves. And Paul and Timothy give two general principles – in commands – for their conduct.

First, slaves are to fear the Lord not men; and, second, slaves must always remember who they serve, in the big picture. This

will affect all they do and place all they do, and experience, now in the context of the final judgement before Jesus.

The same applies for masters. Those sitting here amongst God's mob must remember that they, too, have a master, a Lord, above all else. This Lord, Jesus, has treated them with a grace they do not merit or deserve, and they must conduct themselves in the same way. The slave – the worker – must know by their conduct and words that Jesus is their Lord. This means that the same grace that they have experienced from their Lord must move through their work relationships.

Again, like I have with the relationships, let me ask some simple questions:

(i) To the employees amongst us, how does your conduct at work reflect on the reputation and interests of Jesus as Lord, in areas as diverse as work ethic, humour, and collegiality?

(ii) To the employers amongst us, how does your employment practice care for your employees with grace in such a way that they know the grace you have received from Jesus, in areas as diverse as work expectations through to the way you deal with disaster and success at work?

3. Walk in the Lord

Paul and Timothy have closed their section on applying the truth about who God's people are – to everyday life as God's mob, and down into the basic unit of society (individuals IN community). At the heart of this application are two key principles – first, in Jesus

as Lord, God has transferred and transformed us: he has done all this by Jesus, for humans who were dead in their sins, and his enemies, in such a way that 'Jesus' story is now our story'; second, with this identity established, God's people are exhorted to 'live as you are', displaying what God has already done for them in Jesus.

Boiled down to its simplest expression, this means 'walking with Jesus as Lord'. Let's get walking, as God's mob, as individuals IN relationship.