

CLOTHES THAT ARE PERFECTLY FITTED

COLOSSIANS 3:18 – 4:1

In Order For Christian Faith To Be Authentic, It Must Be Lived Out In Everyday Life. It Must First Be Demonstrated In The Context Of Family.

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Clothes That Are Perfectly Fitted

Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

We have already talked about how the Apostle Paul used the concept of getting dressed and undressed. In other words, he said that we should take off those things that belong to the world and the flesh. We should take off the clothes of anger, sexual immorality, and self-centered lust. We should put on the clothes of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

Paul now goes into what these qualities should like in everyday life. Since the family unit is the basis for all of society, he describes what these characteristics ought to look like in the Christian household. Now there is a great deal of debate about whether Paul lays out the desired structure for a Christian household or if he is just using the structure that already existed in the Hebrew, Roman, and Greek cultures. In other words, for the most part, the husband was the head of the household. Women, children, and slaves were under his control.

I have written and preached about this before. What I want to do this morning is simply describe what I think he wants all Christians to know. In other words, we will all find ourselves in situations where we are expected to follow and to serve. We will all find ourselves in positions where we will be required to lead. We should all understand that in order to be a good teacher, one must first be a good student. In order to be a good leader, one must know how to submit, obey, and follow.

People have used these passages to justify their own authority and importance. However, the passage is driven by the theme that Jesus is our Lord and Master. In the parallel passage in Ephesians, Paul uses the phrase, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21 / NIV).

But sometimes we carried away with our own importance and forget that. Let me give you an example. My wife and I were traveling with another couple on vacation. My friend was the CEO of a major corporation. We stopped for gas at a small station. There was only one guy working the station. As my friend filled up the car, he noticed that his wife was talking and smiling at the gas station attendant. When they saw him looking at them, the attendant walked away and pretended as though nothing had happened.

As we drove away, he asked his wife if she knew the attendant. She admitted she did and in fact, she had known him very well and dated him through high school. My friend couldn't help himself. He said, "Boy, were you lucky I came along. If you had married him, you'd be the wife of a gas station attendant instead of the wife of a Chief Executive Officer."

His wife replied, "Dear, if I had married him, he'd be the CEO and you'd be the gas station attendant."

There are several ways that we could approach this passage, but in the spirit of the letter, I would like to take it from this perspective. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **IN ORDER FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH TO BE AUTHENTIC, IT MUST BE LIVED OUT IN EVERYDAY LIFE. IT MUST FIRST BE DEMONSTRATED IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY.** In other words, as we have said all along, faith is the action based on a belief. In the context of Paul's letter to the Colossians, Christian faith is the attitudes and behaviors we exhibit based on the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord.

I'm going to take a little bit of a different approach in studying through this passage. I am going to approach it with the assumption that we will all be called on to make these qualities part of our everyday experience at one time or another. Therefore, I have grouped the appropriate behaviors and attitudes together.

I. WHAT MAKES A PERFECT FIT (18b, 20b, 22b, 23-24, 1b)

Authentic Christianity Recognizes That All Of Life Is Lived In The Presence Of God And In Submission To God.

Secondly, I believe that in order to do proper bible study, we must take the passage in the context of similar passages. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote a similar message to the church in Ephesus. Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 closely parallel the passage we are studying this morning. Now we have already said that Paul described the proper clothing for Christians as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I will explain the usage of the word fit in my outline in the first section. But for now, let's look at love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control as clothes that we are to wear. So if these are the clothes we are supposed to be wearing, what makes a perfect fit? I think that this is one of the most fundamental truths Christians have to understand in order to be authentic Christians. **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY RECOGNIZES THAT ALL OF LIFE IS LIVED IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND IN SUBMISSION TO GOD.**

Sometimes I think that even though we say the right thing, we never seem to really make it part of our everyday lives. We must start from the very basic act of faith in knowing Who is Lord. You may say to me, "John, how stupid can you be? Everybody knows that Jesus Christ is the Lord." Let me just answer by saying that the Devil and all his demons know that Jesus Christ is Lord. But let me get a running start in this morning's text by quoting the verse we ended up with last time:

"¹⁷And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:17 / NLT).

In other words, we must remember that whatever we say or do directly reflects on our Lord Jesus Christ. And what is interesting to me is that Paul chooses the context of the home that authenticates our faith. In other words, how we treat our husbands, wives, children, and parents provides an opportunity for us to examine if our faith is genuine or not. Let me speak as a pastor. If I cannot be a kind, gentle, and loving husband, father, and son, there is no reason that I could ever be a kind, gentle, and loving pastor. It seems that God has chosen the home as a proving ground of faith. I would tell a husband who is having an affair that he is probably not a Christian because Jesus cannot be his Lord. A husband who abuses his wife and children cannot be a Christian because Jesus is not his Lord. The same goes for rebellious children or argumentative wives. I don't think this is overstating the point.

A. KNOWING WHO IS LORD (23-25, 1b)

Look at verses 23-25. Again Paul restates the theme. He says that "Whatever" we do we are to do it as if we were serving our Lord and Savior Jesus.

I do not want to be understood in any way so let me say this right up front. I firmly believe that we are saved by grace through faith. But I want to quickly add that faith includes action. I know I have used these examples but permit me to use them because I think they are so graphic. Let's say that I have an argument with my wife. I leave the house and get in my car to go to work. It occurs to me that God expects me to be at peace with my wife. Now listen to this because I think this demonstrates who the lord of our lives is. If I just get in the car and go to work, I have demonstrated that I am the lord of my life. At this point, there is no reason for me to think that I am a believer who possesses authentic faith. If I turn off the car, go back into the house and make things right with my wife, I have demonstrated that Jesus is the Lord of my life.

I have actually had married men having affairs come to me and say things like, "God has brought this other woman into my life. He is encouraging me to leave my wife and marry this woman he brought into my life." I always tell these guys, "First of all God did not bring this other woman

into your life. And secondly, if you don't stop this affair right now, there is no reason to think that you are a Christian. You have demonstrated to me that you are the lord of your life, not Jesus." I have had men having affairs tell me, "I love my children but I don't love my wife." I tell them, "You don't love your children, you love you."

There is no doubt about this fact. If Jesus is our Lord and Savior, then we will submit to and obey the clear commands of the Bible. To make up our own rules means that we are the lord of our own lives and we have rejected Jesus as Lord.

Remember, we live for eternity. If we reject Jesus as Lord by the way we conduct ourselves, then there is no reason to believe heaven is our home. However, if all we do takes into account that what we say and do directly affects our Lord and Savior Jesus, then there is every reason to anticipate heaven and all its rewards.

And please do not miss this. Look at the last phrase in verse 1 of chapter 4. Jesus is our Master. Ultimately there are only two possible masters we serve: Jesus or Satan. When we chase after the things of this world, we are actually serving Satan as lord. In talking about chasing after wealth, Jesus put it like this:

*"²⁴No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money"
(Matthew 6:24 / NLT).*

If there is one truth that comes loud and clear throughout the Bible it is that God is not willing to share our love and devotion with any other. He demands our full loyalty. The Apostle Paul told the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. If we were to examine how we treat our husbands, wives, children, and parents, knowing that Jesus sees and knows everything, shouldn't we be frightened to have to acknowledge that perhaps our own selfish lusts and desires and pride have become our lords? There is only one Lord Jesus Christ. If He is not our Lord, then He is not our Savior.

B. LOVING OUR LORD (20b, 22b)

Once we know, confess, submit to, and truly understand what He has done on our behalf, loving our Lord ought to motivate all that we do. I'm quickly approaching 60-years-old, but I remember what it means to be in love, and what it meant to love my children as little children. I rode cattle trains in Taiwan to meet Luig in a particular city. If our kids wanted a particular toy, I would drive endless miles to find what they wanted. Why? Because I loved them and wanted to make them happy. The older I get, the more I realize what Jesus did for me on the cross.

As I continually look at my life, I realized that I have lived a charmed life. God has been incredibly good to me. How could I disgrace Him by sinning and disobeying Him? These days, I want to continue to get rid of sin with the motivation that I love God and want to make Him happy. Look at the end of verse 20. I want to love my wife, my children, and my parents in a way that pleases God. You see, I don't get to choose or define what love means or how I'll love them. I need to love them the way God told me to love them as He defined it in the Bible. I also think that I have in the past mistakenly loved my wife and children by placing them above my love for God. It is extremely important to remember that Jesus is Lord: not my wife, my children, my parents, or any one else.

And that is where the second half of verse 22 comes into play. When I love my family, it must be with sincerity and reverence to the Lord Jesus Christ first.

C. APPROPRIATE FOR OUR LORD (18b)

And that brings us to living life in a way that is appropriate for our Lord. Look at the last phrase in verse 18. It says, "as is fitting in the Lord." That word fitting is a great word. It comes from Greek philosophy. It is *aneiko*. It means something like this. It is fitting for fish to swim in

water. It is fitting for birds to fly in the air. It is fitting for the royal family to act with dignity. It is fitting for Christians to live as if Jesus is our Lord and owns us. To understand this concept is not only necessary to understand this passage, but it is necessary to understand life in Christ. Whether I find myself in a position that requires me to obey and submit, I must remember that Jesus is my Lord. I serve God first. So the Bible tells me to obey and submit to the government. If the government tells me to deny Jesus, I must refuse because my primary submission is to the Lord Jesus Christ. We must keep in mind that Jesus is Lord, not our bosses, not husbands, and not parents. I'd like to sum up this section by restating verse 23 in this section, and then the driving verse in the Ephesians' passage:

"²³Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people" (Colossians 3:23 / NLT).

"²¹And further, you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21 / NLT).

There can be no mistake about this point. **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY RECOGNIZES THAT ALL OF LIFE IS LIVED IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND IN SUBMISSION TO GOD.**

II. FIT TO SERVE (VS18a, 20a, 22a)

Authentic Christians Practice Humble Submission.

I want us to keep in mind this phrase "fitting in the Lord" because that is the thought that drives the passage. Let's talk about what being fit to serve looks like for Christians. In other words **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS PRACTICE HUMBLE SUBMISSION.** Many people think that Paul was a misogynist and supported slavery. If one were to read the Bible carefully and understood the culture of the time, they would quickly realize that Paul has undermined both the prevailing Roman, Greek, and Hebrew social norms. Please think about this for a moment with me. Wives are told to submit to their husbands. Children are told to obey their parents, and slaves are told to obey their masters. What is Paul asking them to do that they were not already expected to do in their culture? Nothing. They were expected to submit and to obey.

However, if we were to put the Ephesians passage and this Colossians passage together, we would find a great deal of change in expectations for Christian husbands, parents, and slave owners. They were now expected to submit to, love, and care for those under them now as equals. That is extremely subversive. So even though Paul doesn't take on the governmental and social structures, within the context of the Christian family and church, everything is turned upside down.

"²⁶So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have been made like him. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28 / NLT).

A. SUBMISSION (18a)

In the first half of verse 18, we are reminded that submission is part of the Christian life. In Paul's day, women were simply expected to obey their husbands. They could end up homeless or dead if they didn't. The word in Greek here is *hypotasso*. It means to willingly subject one's self to another. There are two things that are important here. First of all, it is a matter of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A woman could no longer just obey her husband. Now it was to be willing submission. The husband should never get the idea that the woman was being forced into this.

Secondly, if this submission is focused on and in the Lord Jesus, the woman is required to stand up to and disobey her husband if he is asking her to do something that is against God and a sin.

I can't tell you how many stories I have heard women tell me where they have committed the most horrific sins and justified them by saying they were just submitting to and obeying their husbands.

Listen, as Christians we are commanded to submit to and obey the government. The Bible is clear. And again, this is to be willing and loyal submission. To be sure, if they require us to deny the Lord Jesus, we will have to disobey. But in our country, as far as I'm aware, the government is not stopping us from feeding the poor, caring for the sick, preaching the Gospel and welcoming people in church. Most of you know my view of government, but I don't spend much time wringing my hands over it. They are not stopping me from living out my faith in Christ so it's my simple duty to submit and obey.

In the church, congregation members are called to submit to and obey their leaders. Of course if the leaders start to teach false theology, the congregation should rebel. But as long as the leaders continue to teach and preach the Word of God and demonstrate through their lives the pursuit of holiness, then the congregation is required to submit and to obey.

B. OBEDIENCE (20a, 22a)

I have kind of lumped together submission and obedience. However, there are times when the Christian must simply obey. In verse 20 and in verse 22, children and slaves are simply commanded to obey. Submission and obedience are not things that we are good at in our society. We have come to believe in personal freedom and personal entitlement to the point that there is no place in our psyches where we can even understand the concepts of submission and obedience.

Just look at our culture. When you go to a store and ask someone to help you, it's almost as if they are annoyed that they actually have to help you. With our labor laws, it is almost impossible to fire bad employees. The society is breaking down at an alarmingly rapid rate because of the lack of respect for authority. And it is no different in the church. People feel as if they have a right to have their way and feel they are entitled to get what they want.

C. PERSPECTIVE (22a)

Look at verse 22 for some perspective. People are good at feigning submission and obedience. They obey or submit when it is convenient or to avoid responsibility but genuine submission and obedience require us to not have our way. I think this is a true statement, "If we cannot submit and obey in our human relationships, then we have no reason to think we can submit to and obey God."

I don't want you to miss how strong that statement is. Here is the justification. When we only submit to and obey in our human relationships when we are in agreement with what the person or institution is asking us to do, then we are not submitting or obeying. It just so happens that our wills are in agreement with those who have authority over us. If that is the case, then we probably obey God and submit to Him when we feel like it or when it's convenient for us to do so.

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS PRACTICE HUMBLE SUBMISSION.

It's fitting for us to be humble and submissive because that is exactly what Jesus modeled for us during His earthly existence. He humbly submitted to the Father's will ... all the way to the cross and the grave. That humble submission is why He was elevated to the highest position in all of eternity:

⁹Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11 / NLT).

III. FIT TO LEAD (19, 21, 1)

Authentic Christians Practice Loving Kindness.

Learning humble submission will make us fit to lead. The reason is this. **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS PRACTICE LOVING KINDNESS.** I chose the words loving kindness because in Hebrew these two words are one compound word *hesed*. *Hesed* is a tender, passionate, and powerful word. It describes God's love for us in the context of all the promises He has made to us in the Bible. It is also the kind of faithful love we are to demonstrate to Him and to others. Leaders who are fit to lead understand these concepts.

A. LOVING (19)

In verse 19, people in authority are required to be loving. In a culture where wives had no standing or power, Paul tells Christian husbands they are required to love their wives and commanded to not be harsh with them or embittered towards them. In the parallel passage in Ephesians, Paul described that love like this:

²⁵And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word. ²⁷He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. ²⁸In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man is actually loving himself when he loves his wife. ²⁹No one hates his own body but lovingly cares for it, just as Christ cares for his body, which is the church. ³⁰And we are his body" (Ephesians 5:25-30 / NLT).

Jesus demonstrated and defined love like this. He put aside all His heavenly privileges, entitlements, and His very life so that each one of us could become the men and women God wants us to be. Think about how radical this would be for Christian men in Paul's day. And further, Paul has laid out the principle that if they were unwilling to do this, then there would be no reason to think they were Christian because their own egos and lusts were their lords. Their culture, society, and friends were their lords.

If Jesus were their Lord, then they would have to submit to the needs of their wives and give up all their entitlements, rights, status, everything to provide an atmosphere where their wives and children can become all God calls them to become. If it is God's will that children obey their parents and that wives submit to their husbands, then if husbands were loving as described here, it would be much easier for wives to submit and children to obey.

And that leads to Paul's next point about husband behavior. Husbands are not to be harsh with their wives. I come from a culture in which husbands treat their wives like dirt. They yell at them, some beat them, many curse at them, and many cheat on them. I'm going to state this in the strongest possible terms. If you want to call yourself a Christian husband, you cannot be mistreating your wife in any way. You can not be screaming at them, yelling at them, cursing them, hitting them, or cheating on them in any way. Did you hear that men? It is a matter of saving faith. Christian husbands are loving the way the Bible defines it.

You see, in my culture, husbands define love by bringing home a paycheck, buying things for their wives and children etc. The Bible defines love by giving up our rights and entitlements, our own lusts and desires, in order to serve our wives, enabling them to become the women God redeemed them to be.

That goes for Christian bosses and Christian pastors, elders and deacons. Any Christian in authority is called on to provide an opportunity for men and women to become all that Christ calls them to be. Again, this must be to submission to the Lord Jesus Christ first.

B. KIND (21)

That goes right into the next quality of those who lead. They are to be kind. It's not enough for parents to know what is best for their children. We have to learn how to not embitter our children. It's relatively easy to get kids to obey. In the Old Testament culture if children did not obey their parents, they were executed. I don't think it would take much to get your children to obey if they saw one of their friends killed for disobedience.

But our goal is to raise children who love and obey God because of the wonderful things He has done. I can say this is the point I agonized over as a parent the most. I wanted my kids to do the right thing, but I also did not want to discourage them. In that pursuit, I think there were times that I was overly strict and paranoid. There were other times that I was overly permissive. I know this is easier to say than to pull off, but Jay Kessler, president of Youth For Christ put it like this: "Major on the majors, and minor on the minors." I know I did my best but I don't think I was ever really smart enough to pull it off. It's one of those things I understand in theory but don't really have the wisdom to pull it off perfectly.

But I do know this. I made up my mind early that if I were to err, I would err on the side of kindness. I think that if you were to ask my wife, children, and parents, they would tell you that I was kind. That's no excuse for other failures, but some things I made up my mind to do. I think the fact they feel free to play practical jokes on me, disagree with me, and bust me in public demonstrates the success of that. Believe me, that's nothing to be proud of, because I fall very, very short in other areas.

C. FAIR (1)

And the next quality of fairness described in verse 1 of chapter 4 is one of those areas I struggle with. This is one I struggle with in life. Look, the Bible is clear here. Christian masters were to treat their slaves fairly knowing that Jesus was both the Master of the slave and the master. I think in the context of my family I was fair in my treatment of them. However, I clearly favor my family over anyone else.

One of the struggles I always have in life is treating people fairly. I often spend time with friends and people that I like while avoiding people that are extremely energy-draining, negative, and that I simply don't like. Now to be sure I would never mistreat anyone or wish any harm on anyone, but the fact is that I will not go out of my way to be with people I don't like to be around. It is something that I constantly work on and like finding the balance in demonstrating love and kindness to my children, I'm not sure that I have ever been successful at dealing with this concept either. There have been many times where I have simply let people walk all over me and take up all my time. There have been other times that I have simply cut them off and not allowed them to take up much of my time. It's easy for me to be with people I enjoy. It's more difficult to be with people I don't like. But the Lord calls us to be fair because He is fair and loves justice. God made it simple through the prophet Micah:

*"⁸ ... people, the LORD has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God"
(Micah 6:8 / NLT).*

Any time we find ourselves in a position of authority, we must remember that Jesus is our Lord and we should conduct ourselves in a manner that is fit to be called His child. We are to be fair, loving, and kind. **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS PRACTICE LOVING KINDNESS.**

IV. EPILOGUE

Again I need to reinforce this thought. The authenticity of our faith is demonstrated in the way we humbly submit to the commands of Scripture. In today's passage we could say this. **IN**

ORDER FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH TO BE AUTHENTIC, IT MUST BE LIVED OUT IN EVERYDAY LIFE. IT MUST FIRST BE DEMONSTRATED IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY.

In his commentary on Colossians, David Garland says this:

"In a Christian marriage, the husband knows himself to be dearly loved by God (3:12) and is commanded to love his wife in the same way. He is not to exercise his rights over his wife but his love, which means he never thinks in terms of rights and is always willing to forego them. Caird states it well: 'If a wife is asked to submit, it is to the husband's love, not his tyranny.' Love in the New Testament context means more than having affection or romantic feelings for a wife (see the fuller explanation in Eph. 5:25-33, where Christ is the model).

The NIV translates the next command that husband are not to 'be harsh with [their wives].' If this is the correct rendering, it rules out any overbearing, tyrannical, or intimidating behavior toward the wife. But the verb *pikrainesthe* is in the passive voice and may be translated, 'Do not become embittered [or resentful] toward her.' Anyone can refrain from harsh treatment of others; Christians must do more, however. They must refrain from becoming flushed with rage or petulant when others treat them or respond to them in ways that irritate them. This directive addresses the eventuality that the wife might not always be properly submissive, which in turn would likely trigger bitterness in her husband."

I hope we are starting to understand what authentic Christianity consists of. It is first of all recognizing that Jesus is Lord. It doesn't matter where we find ourselves. Submission, obedience, and willingness are required of us in our human and institutional relationships, provided we are not asked to clearly disobey God.

When we find ourselves in leadership positions, love, kindness, and fairness are to be characteristics that demonstrate we belong to Jesus.

Finally, it doesn't matter what the other person thinks. We are required to exhibit these qualities because we are ultimately serving Jesus as our Lord.