

There's this thing called the NFL draft, and in 2022, the 49ers owned the final pick of the draft. Each year, the last man picked in the draft receives a nickname—Mr. Irrelevant. Of course, just being picked by an NFL team is an honor. But when you get the title Mr. Irrelevant, you get teased. There are snickers and punchlines, and I think for the 49ers, with the 22nd pick, they were thinking this guy might be great for their practice squad. Well, they picked a young man named Brock Purdy, an average-sized college quarterback, a four-year starter at Iowa State. And next Sunday, Brock Purdy will lead his 49ers team into the Super Bowl.

Steve Young interviewed Brock and asked some great questions. You could see Brock's faith come out of him and shared so naturally. He is 24 years old, an athlete, and a Christian, but let's not put him on a pedestal. We have seen too many athletes over the years, young athletes, that have fallen off their pedestals. But I would like you to hear some of the things that he said. He asked him, "What keeps you grounded these days?" Brock paused for a second and said,

I remember who I am. It's all God. Because God is in control and has a plan, I'm not afraid to fail. And I'm not afraid to take risks. I know that those of us on the field are not gods. We just have the blessing of being able to play a great game. I realize people have a lot bigger struggles in life than winning a football game. I strive to love my teammates and my family, and I know that I am to be wherever God wants me. I have a new identity in Christ that keeps things simple. He has a plan much bigger and more beautiful than anything I could imagine. So, I just get up every morning, and I go to work.
Purdy

Paul is very carefully saying in the verses we've been reading in Colossians to remember who we are in Christ so that we can stay grounded no matter what situation we find ourselves in, so that we would love others well and just show up to work. Listen to the words of Paul in Colossians chapter 3

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. vv. 1-3

So what Paul is telling us is because we have been raised into a new life with Christ, we are now new creations. We are a new humanity. He reminds us that we are this collection of new men, women, children, parents, husbands, and new wives. What we have is a new way to live. We're to live as different people. Paul says he wants us to act not like what we were but like what we are now after we've invited Jesus Christ into our hearts. Colossians 3:17 is a great place to start. *"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (v. 17).*

Paul's words might seem impossible for you to receive. Paul is inviting you as a new person in Christ to get up and go to work, to not fear failure, and to take a risk. Because God is in you, and as new men and women in Christ, this new humanity, we can do this. If his words seem hard and you think, this could never be you; I want you to remember who you are in Christ as we go through this.

First, he invites us into this new marriage. He says, *"Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them" (vv. 18-19).* When Paul says these words, it may seem shocking and even out of touch in the 21st century. But we need to remember that in the ancient world, a man literally owned his wife. Jewish women could not divorce, but men could divorce for any reason. In Greek culture, women were not allowed to be in public places without their husbands. This idea of "wives submit to your husbands as is fitting to the Lord," the word "submit" in Greek is *hupotasso*, which means to voluntarily arrange by rank and get in proper order.

It's in the middle voice here, which drives home the notion that wives should choose to set aside some of

their rights to fit a role to help the marriage work well. Submitting yourself has nothing to do with anyone's superiority or inferiority in any way. Notice that Paul doesn't command wives to obey as he later does for children in verse 20. But from all the way back in the creation story, there is an order. A wife is equal to her husband in personhood and value and worth, but she's under his headship and is asked to voluntarily come under that headship in marriage.

I love the example of this in the Trinity, that our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, are completely equal in every way, but Jesus submitted to the will of his Father. And yes, a wife in the new marriage has an obligation, but the husband in the new marriage has an even higher bar. Husbands are commanded to love their wives and not be harsh. The word for love here is agape, and it's an imperative command. Agape is the deepest, most far-reaching definition of love. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates this to, "*Go all out in your life for your wife.*" *Imagine what that might look like.*

According to my study this week, there was no ancient household code of behavior in any of the history that surrounded the New Testament and any other code of conduct that commanded men to love their wives and children. In ancient households, codes or these commands were only given to the wives. So, this sets the Bible apart. It sets what it means to be a new humanity apart. Paul says a new husband is to have compassion toward his wife, to be filled with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience toward his wife. He is to bear her idiosyncrasies; he is to forgive as Christ has forgiven him, and he is to love as Christ loves him.

It's important that we understand that the term headship is not as a rule or as an authority, but we see our marriage through Christ's example of his love for his church. Christ is the head of his church, and he showed his headship by sacrifice and sacrificial love for his church. That's the example the new husbands are to follow. You're to take that headship to mean you are to sacrifice for your wives. The new headship does assume some leadership but also tender affection. So I challenge husbands, as I challenge myself, to have that perfect balance between leadership and affection. Because when both happen, your wives have a reason to come under and submit

That word translated as "husband" is interesting. It means one who cultivates his marriage. Someone said, "A happy man marries the girl he loves. A happier

man loves the girl he marries." A happier man accepts the commitment to work on that marriage, to nurture it, to feed it, to till the soil, to grow it. Now, emotional feelings are great; they're certainly fun; feeling in love is exciting. But biblical love is not only measured by emotion. Don't measure your love by goosebumps or a pitter-patter in your heart. I had some really good Mexican food this week, and I had a pitter-patter in my heart. It's totally different!

So where does this harshness that he's talking about come from? It comes from ongoing unresolved issues, anger issues, turning inward, and becoming bitter. From that bitterness comes a harshness. Julie and I saw a marriage counselor several years ago when we were going through something, and we needed some foundational help in our marriage. The work he assigned us was all about learning to communicate, listen, speak clearly, and learn not to attack or point fingers. So we were learning how to communicate better. But he said to understand that marriage is like a bank. Criticisms are withdrawals, but affirmations are deposits. You need up to ten deposits of affirmation to cover one withdrawal of criticism. So when we criticize and are being harsh, we're draining the bank.

I want to give some more information on biblical submission and what that looks like to hopefully bring clarity and maybe alleviate some misunderstandings that people studying this topic have. The biblical submission that Paul is showing us here only applies in the new home and certainly in other places. There's a level of that in the church in terms of who's an authority in our church, but that's a sermon for a different time. Hupotasso is not meant to apply anywhere else, not at our work, not in our politics, or in our education, nowhere else.

And submission is not taking orders. When the new husband and new wife don't see eye to eye, there's to be a thoughtful, healthy discussion and a high value for both the wife's and the husband's opinions. My wife and I've been married for 38 years. We could say that most of the time, after a good discussion, there comes good collaboration. If you are a new husband and you think you need to play that submit card and you're playing it often, there is something wrong in your marriage. You need to rethink and reorientate what it means to be the new husband as part of the new humanity.

Wives, submission is not following your husband into sin or something harmful to yourself or your children. If your husband asks you to cut corners or lie, don't do

it. If your husband is active in an addiction, don't hide it. If your husband is physically or emotionally abusive in any way, get yourself and your family out of harm's way. Because what God tells us over and over again is we have a higher leader. We serve a higher master, and his name is Jesus. And that submitting to him first is the highest of priorities. Jesus would never want anyone to live in a dangerous or illegal environment.

As the new husbands and new wives, we're to be thankful that he didn't just make us as new people on the inside. He made us new people to transform our marriages. And I encourage you to embrace this new role that we've been given in our new marriages as a new humanity. Husbands, lean into that role that Christ has recreated you for. Wives, lean into that role that Christ has recreated you to have. And get support. Our season of marriage counseling that my wife and I had benefited us so much in that time. We have married people here at CPC of all ages showing courage to reach out for support. Let us help support you.

As new people in Christ, we can also have a new family. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord" (v. 20). The word for children here is teknon, which carries the meaning of children of any age who are under their parent's roof. So, kids, if you're 50 years old and you're still living under your parent's roof, this applies to you! This is so important because God included this in the 5th commandment that he gave Moses to give to the Israelites, and it came with a promise. Deuteronomy 5:16 says, "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

I think of Jesus' last words on the cross. Some of his last words were directed toward his mother and toward those around his mother. He honored his mother by making sure her needs were taken care of after his death. The word for obey, hupakouo, is different from submit that we discussed earlier. It literally means to listen under, for children to listen to their parents.

Children, any who are here today might be asking, "Why should I listen?" Well, there's a few reasons. The first one is you're just expensive! From infancy until age 18, the average cost in the U.S. to raise a child is \$310,000 per child. That's a nice beach house in Aruba! And maybe a little deeper reason for you to listen is remembering who you are in Christ. You are a new citizen because you are a follower of Christ. You are a new child in a new family. You have parents,

and you have higher-up parent named God, and he's pleased when children obey and listen to their parents.

Another reason to obey parents is because, generally, they have more wisdom and experience than you have. Obedience is also valuable. It's a discipline so valuable to learn. And if we don't learn obedience in the home, we're less likely to be obedient to our teachers, our employers, and our coaches. There's strong evidence that the breakdown of our society in general comes from a breakdown in the home.

"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (v. 21). It's interesting that he narrows down verse 21 to fathers, not just to parents. As a father, I think I understand why. Dads have so much influence on our children for the positive and for the negative. We are a powerful force in our families. I know my daughter still remembers how I hurt her feelings back in high school when we were having one of those "what are you going to do with your life" conversations. She brought up a career path, and my knee-jerk reaction was, "Oh no, not that," and she closed down at that point. She still remembers it. Then later, I missed attending an important event in her life, and the hurt is still there. She still remembers it. She still struggles with that. We have such power to heal, to build confidence, to build security, to grow feelings of worth, but we also have the power to wound, hurt, and feed insecurities. Dads, when we think about all the tough jobs that we've had in our lives, parenting and being a father are the toughest, but they're the most important.

I've heard it said that raising kids is like pushing an old car in first gear with the emergency brake jammed on and a sumo wrestling team inside, pushing it from New York to Hawaii and then back. And just when you are getting this parenting thing down, they leave home. With all the challenges kids and parents face, I just want to say, parents here at CPC, keep meeting together, keep praying together, keep encouraging each other, and hold those worldly and cultural standards that you were raised with loosely.

You, as new parents, have a new family, and we have lots of parenting resources that can help you in our CPC Kids and CPC student ministries. The most important thing Charles Spurgeon said was that our kids become followers of Jesus. He said to teach them. So, teach them, parents, all the way to heaven.

One of the things about parenting that my wife and I are thankful we learned early in our lives is that our homes should not be simply child-centered. In other

words, when we had a bigger house and younger kids, when people walked through our front door, they wouldn't stumble over our kids' toys. Our kid's toys and environment were not at the very center of that living room space. We had another space, a play area, where they played and where their toys were kept. And there was so much we learned. We learned that if kids are at the center of attention it breeds insecurity. If kids understand that they're part of a family and there's a committed mom and dad that are committed to each other and love to be with each other and converse and actually really do indeed love each other, that brings security for the kids.

So think about that. Are we way too child-centered in our household, and do our kids need to see more of what a marriage looks like and what a partnership looks like? As a new people in Christ, we can have a new marriage, a new family.

Then, he moves into verse 22. *"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord."* It's important that we understand that when we see the word slave in the New Testament, we need to explain what slavery looked like in the Roman Empire. Historians would say that slavery was a big part of life in the Empire. Up to one-third of the population was a slave. Roman slavery was thought to be very different from American slavery, which led up to our American Civil War. American slavery was based on racial prejudice, and those who were enslaved were not considered fully human. The closest thing we have to American slavery in the United States today is sex trafficking. I read this week that 500 traffickers and abusers of young women and men were recently arrested in a sting operation. As a new people in Christ, we're to be committed to fighting modern slavery in America as well as slavery in any form throughout the world.

But a more accurate word for what's being described here in Colossians, what Paul is saying for slave is called bondservant. A bondservant was someone who became bonded to someone to work for them for an agreed period of time. I'm sure that wasn't how all of them were, but this was a common thing. People became bondservants for a variety of reasons. Maybe they had a big debt, and they became bankrupt. By becoming a bondservant they could pay back their debtor, even though they didn't have any money. Maybe they were prisoners of war, and their conquerors brought them on as a bondservant. Maybe

they were an unwanted child and, for survival, took the role of a bondservant. Now, don't get me wrong, being a bondservant wasn't a happy life. But I read that oftentimes, bondservants were freed when they reached the point of adulthood, 30 years old.

There is no place in Scripture that defends slavery. Some question why Paul didn't speak out and protest more against slavery. I like the words of N.T. Wright who said, "Slavery was so ingrained in Roman society, for Paul to rail against slavery, would be like a modern-day preacher railing against the gas combustible engine." Slavery was just a way of life. So what Paul did here was establish a fixed point to change the world, that the world would change when one person at a time would hear the good news of Jesus and become a new person, that the Holy Spirit would convict them to set their bondservants free and that they would see themselves as a bondservant to a higher master, their Lord, and Savior. It's part of this new humanity.

So, the context is slaves and masters, but the principles here can apply to new employers and new employees in the workplace. What does Paul teach the new employee? What is the principle here? Be obedient. Do what your boss asks, do it on time, and do it well. Don't just do it or work when the boss is looking. One summer, I worked for United Parcel. That was the hardest job I ever had in my life physically. We loaded semi-trucks. The managers would walk the floor, and we all knew out of the corner of our eyes when the manager was getting close. And boy, did we pick it up.

As I think of myself now as a new creation in Christ, how hard we work will often determine what our coworkers and bosses think about God. He says to work with reverence. What an interesting phrase. Christians are never to separate secular work from sacred work. All work is sacred. We're not to be Las Vegas Christians—how we act in church stays in church, and how we act at work stays at work. That's not how we're to live. We can't be double-minded.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. vv. 23-24

Of course, we work for that earthly paycheck, but more importantly, we are working for an eternal paycheck. And some of us get impatient at our jobs. We'll work and work, and where's the promotion? Where's

the reward? I remember a story of missionaries in Africa back at the turn of the 20th century. They were coming home after serving a whole career in Africa, sharing Christ. They're on this ship, which just so happened that President Teddy Roosevelt was also on the ship. He was over in Africa, shooting animals, whatever Teddy did, and tons of people were cheering and clapping as the ship came into the New York Harbor because they knew that their president was on board. This missionary couple saw all that was going on. The couple quietly got off the ship and ended up in this cheap hotel because that was all they could afford.

The husband says to his wife, "It's just not right. We give our lives to save souls, and we come home and get nothing. He comes home from a hunting trip and gets fanfare." His wife came over to him and said, "Just be patient. We're not home yet." I love that. Our promised reward in heaven is much greater.

Paul goes on to say, *"Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism"* (v. 25). It's important for us to remember that as new employees, ultimately, when you look around your workplace, no one's going to get away with anything because Jesus is watching. He will repay us for what we have done right, and he's saying here, for what we have done wrong. I know some of you are going through a tough experience. You were passed over for that promotion, you were falsely accused, maybe you were fired unfairly, and it just seems like the bosses and others are getting away with hurting you. But Paul is reminding us that justice will prevail someday. Justice will never be stopped; it's only delayed. May we hold on to that.

Then, he switches from employees to employers. *"Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven"* (4:1). So what are we to do as employers, as managers? We're to provide as much professionalism to our departments as we can, and our workplaces for our employees to be equitable, fair, and practice integrity. The new employers in Christ need to remember that before Christ came into your life. You did consider yourself to be the boss, but now that you are in Christ, you have a higher boss, a master in heaven. I love what Paul says in Romans 6:22. "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

We've talked about the new marriage, new family, and new workplace. Now we're going to close out with

the section called new duties. The new responsibilities a new person in Christ has as they serve society.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. vv. 2-6

This new humanity that we have gives us a new way to pray. We began our Christian lives with prayer, and we asked God to do what only God can do. Prayer helps us align with God's purposes. So we pray things like: not my will be done, but your will be done, God. For some of us who struggle in prayer, we see prayer as when you're on an airplane and the flight attendant will talk to you about the oxygen masks. You know they're there. You're glad they're there. You just hope you're never really going to have to rely on them! That, in turn, you'd rather do it yourself. You'd rather fly that plane yourself. But he's saying that this is not how it is. We are not just to believe in prayer theoretically; we're to believe in prayer in reality.

He's saying to continue to devote yourselves in prayer. Persist in prayer. Pray without ceasing. Jesus always prayed. And for the Christian life, prayer should be like breathing—nothing too big, nothing too small. He says, pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should.

And notice that Paul asks for a specific prayer. We need to ask for specific prayers. Asking for specific prayer is the one way you know a prayer gets answered. And what does he ask for? He asks for opportunities and open doors. But notice it wasn't "open prison doors." He's in prison. What he's asking for is prayer for opportunities to share the gospel. It was more important for Paul to be faithful in that, where he was. Of course, he wanted to be free from prison, but it was more important that he be faithful to what his calling was wherever he was. And boy, did Paul receive open doors! We have at least four prison letters—Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon—and we can say today, thank God that he went to prison.

If you go to Philippians 1, he praises God and thanks God that while he was under house arrest in Rome,

the whole palace guard heard the gospel from him. Amazing! In the upper chambers of Caesar's palace, the gospel was heard. God's people pray with very specific prayers.

The next thing is, as a new humanity, we have a new way to love outsiders. *"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity."* Our message is the loudest and the clearest by how we act. These people outside the church are watching and evaluating what goes on inside our church. Make the most of every opportunity. In other words, as translated in the NIV, the idea is to use our limited time to live wisely toward outsiders. And the wording in Greek, which is really translated to time, is in short supply. Don't fritter it away, is how one Greek scholar put it.

So I'm thankful we were given this opportunity through this Christmas outreach fund to come together and raise just enough funds, a generous amount of funds, that we can serve low-income neighborhoods in San Mateo and provide all kinds of resources for building new wells and providing supplies to share the gospel in Cambodia. You saw the need. You responded in a timely manner and generously. It's interesting, when I talk to my neighbors where I live, and we talk a little bit about life and maybe some things that we do, I find that my neighbors are most interested when they hear about the work that CPC does outside the walls of the church, outside of what happens here on Sunday morning. They're most engaged in that conversation. That's what they seem to care most about. And that fits, I think, why Paul is telling us a new way to interact with outsiders.

And finally, a new humanity has a new speech. *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone"* (v. 6). Be full of grace, nice, respectful, honest, pure, right, righteous, building up. That means not just speaking but also listening and showing those same qualities as we listen well. What does salt provide? It means that your speech has an effect. Salt adds flavor to bland food. Salty speech adds flavor, and it leads to engaging conversation. Salt can sting. You know the phrase, rub salt in the wound. It can be convicting. It can be purifying. And Paul is saying, as new men and new women pray that you will say the right words in

the right way to the right people. As Paul prayed and worked, so we should pray and work.

So how does someone overcome the label Mr. Irrelevant? How does someone overcome a fear of failure? How does someone overcome a bar that seems so impossibly high? How does someone not melt away when others try to tear them down? How does someone just get up every day and go to work?

The answer is that they know who they are—new men, new women, new humanity. We died with Christ, and now we have been resurrected with him into new life. I don't want us to ever forget that even if society is casting dispersions on you because you are in Christ, you are relevant. He made you, so, you have been fearfully and wonderfully recreated in Christ. You can have a new marriage. You can have a new family. You can have a new workplace. Your prayers do matter. Your lifestyle matters. Your speech matters. You can influence society because you are a new humanity. We stand united as a body, and we are a new humanity. We worship God for that reason.

I want to invite you to consider a couple of challenges today. The first is your marriage, your family, your workplace. May they be the means by which you offer yourself to God to reach the world that Jesus Christ died to save. Maybe the Holy Spirit triggered something in you today in those areas.

The second challenge I want to invite you to consider is that your prayers, your lifestyle, and your speech are the means by which you offer yourself to God to reach the world for Jesus Christ, the world he died to save. Maybe God's triggering something in you—prayers, lifestyle, speech—that your new humanity now brings conviction to you. Take a moment and listen to what God might be saying to you, to all new husbands, wives, parents, children, employees, employers, and all citizens of God's new humanity. May you hear these words wherever you go, wherever God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. God has a purpose in your being right where you are. Christ, who indwells you by the power of his Holy Spirit, wants to do something in and through you.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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