

WHY JESUS WINS [Colossians 3:18-4:1, VULNERABLE]

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Netflix series *Stranger Things* has become a cultural phenomenon.
 - a. Whether it's the nostalgia or the drama/comedy/thriller hybrid, it's has quite a following.
 - b. In Season 1, we're introduced to the 1980's Spielbergian narrative and characters.
 - c. But in Season 2, the show adopted a tried/tested character development strategy.
 - d. Whether in television or movies, screenwriters like to employ to create good story.
 - 1) The initial iteration introduces you to characters and their established traits but . . .
 - 2) . . . sequels will create peculiar pairings of those characters to chase mini-tasks.
 - 3) What this does is give space for characters to grow and become more compelling.
 - 4) In this tension, they learn more about themselves and grow.
2. As we continue this study of the book of Colossians, this week might feel like a sequel.
 - a. The first 17 verses of chapter three looked at the Colossian community as a whole.
 - b. The initial plot line was their being set-apart from the culture; vices and virtues.
 - c. Now starting in verse 18, there's a pairing-off where we're look at specific categories.
 - d. We'll discover how specific groups are called toward self-discovery and growth.
3. These texts of Scriptures are sometimes some of the most controversial for Jesus followers.
 - a. Known as "**household codes**," they assigned responsibilities/expectations to individuals.
 - b. A similar code is found in the fifth chapter of the book of Ephesians.
 - c. Note, however, that this was rooted in culture and wasn't created by Paul.
 - 1) Household codes were common in his day.
 - 2) The Greco-Romans were focused on issues of the household.
 - a) They believed that the home was a microcosm of the state.
 - b) And orderly home, they believed, would reflect order in the government.
 - 3) Even Aristotle wrote of household codes in *Politics*:
"The investigation of everything should begin with [the household's] smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of these three relationships."
 - d. Paul, inspired by Spirit, took these Greco-Roman cultural norms and elevated them
 - 1) He begins with their patriarchal society
 - 2) He examines the same three relationships Aristotle talked about.
*So these are our pairs; spoke to both parts of each pairing
 - 3) He then transforms from within—modifying them as well as raising them
 - 4) The result is Christ-like standards: if you're Christian, you ought be even better
4. And we will discover how these challenging concepts affirm *Why Jesus Wins*.

VERSES 18,19

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

1. Here, Paul calls for wives to submit.
 - a. Again, on the surface, some may interpret this as chauvinism.
 - b. But before making a judgment, we should examine the culture beneath this.
 - 1) First, Paul doesn't speak the way his contemporaries spoke about wives.
 - 2) For example, Josephus called them "inferior" and Philo referred to them as "servants."
 - 3) Second, his word choice in the original language should be noted.
 - a) He didn't use the Greek word *hypakouø* which means "obedience."
 - b) Rather, Paul used the word *hypotassø* (translated as submission)
 - c) This word indicates a choice. Wives are being asked to choose.
 - d) This is not a universal law of male dominance; it is a request.

- c. Wives have the ability to lead or he wouldn't have brought this topic up.
 - 1) It's a request of the wife to please allow the husband to lead.
 - 2) In Paul's culture, there were reasons they wouldn't want to choose submission.
 - 3) But since they had equality in Christ, maybe wives wanted to react differently.
 - 4) Still, they were asked to submit, performing their part in this harmonious union.
- d. The phrase, "as fitting in the Lord" makes this choice greater, than an earthly relationship.
- 2. On the other side of the relationship, Paul asks husbands to do their part—even better.
 - a. The husbands were actually given an even higher standard: *agape* love.
 - 1) Paul spoke of this love in previous verses.
 - 2) He called the Colossians to compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience . . .
 - 3) But over all these Christ-like traits, to put on love.
 - b. Why did Paul specifically call husband out after he just called on *all* Christians to love?
 - 1) He needed to get specific because of the prevailing culture of the day.
 - 2) Generally, husbands in this society led their household with a heavy hand.
 - 3) Christian husbands were not to look like the other ones around them.
 - 4) And not being HARSH means that it doesn't hurt your manliness to behave with love.
 - c. This love to which Paul is calling husbands to is modeled on Christ's love:
 - 1) How did Jesus love? In Colossians 1, it's by not wielding his power harshly.
 - 2) Rather, he humbled himself to death for us, out of love.
 - 2. Husbands in that culture had status/power but are being asked to use it lovingly.
- 3. Finally, a note to people in the church to whom these verses do not apply: Singles.
 - a. Even though we read a wife submitting to her husband, this is in a covenant relationship.
 - b. This relationship, however, is not a call for every woman nor for every man.
 - c. In **Colossians 4:15**, Paul sends the follow greeting: "*to Nympha and the church in her house.*"
 - 1) This implied she was patroness and leader of a house church.
 - 2) She may have been widowed or perhaps never even married.
 - 3) That Paul admits her role, even in a male-centric culture, is telling.
 - d. We must tread lightly on how we apply these texts to other contexts.

VERSES 20,21

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

- 1. Children are called to obey.
 - a. Looking at context, children here may be older than we imagine; maybe young adults.
 - 1) In this culture, young people tended to stay at home longer.
 - 2) Some didn't want to exchange independence for provision.
 - 3) Pretty much, this is the basis for Matthew McConaughey in *Failure to Launch*.
 - b. But if they stayed longer than they might otherwise had, they were called to submit.
 - 1) They were to respect their parents' authority as managers of the house.
 - 2) But at the same time, these children still had a voice.
 - 3) The fact that Paul even speaking to children at all is notable in this society.
 - 4) Treating children as thinking, active participants in church and home was unique
 - 5) Not only did it please the Lord, it allowed the household to function smoothly.
- 2. Fathers and Parents were told not to embitter their children.
 - a. Not much is known about behavior back in this time between parents and children.
 - b. Typically children were disciplined, as they are today, to learn obedience.
 - c. But this is not to be harsh for harshness sake; parents are told not to aggravate or stir up.
 - d. Why? So that children aren't discouraged and lose heart.

VERSES 22—4:1

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.²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for

the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism. 4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1. An important distinction: slavery in this era was not like American slavery (based on ethnicity).
 - a. There were three ways in which a person could become a slave in the 1st century.
 - 1) If you were captured in war
 - 2) If you were born into slavery
 - 3) If you were the recipient of a legal punishment
 - b. There were also many different kinds of slaves
 - 1) There were household slaves (cooking, cleaning, children)
 - 2) There were imperial and public slaves
 - 3) There were slaves in urban crafts and services
 - 4) There were agricultural slaves (fields), and mining slaves.
 - c. More surprising is that slaves could actually own slaves.
 - d. Slaves could be freed at any time.
 - e. Slaves might be chosen to be free because of their skill and devotion.
 - f. But we shouldn't be fooled: they could be treated as harshly as we imagine
 - g. Rome didn't know how to function without slaves; they were 10% of population
2. So slaves were told that they should work as if for the Lord, not for people
 - a. Work for the Lord means to serve him despite of an awful situation.
 - b. Have a higher motivation and you will be rewarded. Maybe not now but in the future.
 - c. Paul writes that slaves will have an inheritance. This is fascinating.
 - 1) What separated slaves from children? Children got an inheritance. Slaves did not.
 - 2) Paul says God has an inheritance for slaves.
 - 3) In His kingdom, slaves are equal to sons and daughters. Their status is elevated.
 - 4) Regardless of their earthly state, they're children of the King w/full rights and privileges.
 - d. "Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for wrongs; no favoritism."
 - 1) This is to give slaves additional hope
 - 2) If your master is treating you wrong, God will know and will judge them.
3. Masters are then called to be right and fair.
 - a. Don't be tempted to abuse your power.
 - b. It was not necessary for slaves to be treated poorly.
 - c. They could be given jobs that fit their skills and intelligence.
 - d. Masters were not almighty in God's eyes. As followers of Jesus, they have a Master too.
4. The big question: Why doesn't Paul just condemn slavery and call for its end?
 - a. Scholars debate this, but we truly don't know.
 - b. It's one of those texts that permits skeptics to critique our faith.
 - c. It could be said that Paul is simply moving society forward.
 - 1) He's not giving guidance on political overhaul.
 - 2) Instead of calling Christian masters to end the system, he asks that they improve it.
 - 3) Maybe that's why Paul, inspired by God, speaks more to slaves here than all other.
 - 4) Maybe they're the ones that need the most support in this household code.
 - d. We can at least compare this to another letter Paul wrote in the New Testament
 - 1) In Philemon, written to a slave master, Paul asks that Onesimus be freed.
 - 2) Paul obviously doesn't like slavery; he wants the slave to be freed.

THINKING THIS THROUGH

1. How do we respond to all of this as moderns, in a world where this sounds ancient?
 - a. At the very least, we must admit to feeling the tension
 - 1) God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. Slavery did and does break his heart.
 - 2) Wives mistreated by husbands breaks his heart.
 - 3) Children abused by parents breaks his heart.

- b. But despite this, he doesn't come in and change everything here on earth.
 - c. This text can bring up far more questions than it answers.
 - d. The Word of God is comprehensive for salvation but doesn't reveal everything.
 - 1) The Bible is meant to speak to us spiritually.
 - 2) It doesn't prohibit us from fighting the system, but it doesn't list how to do it either.
 - a) God doesn't say there's no hope for tomorrow
 - b) But Jesus did say in Matthew 6 that each day has enough trouble of its own.
 - c) When one trouble is resolved, sinful humans will create new trouble.
 - e. At the very least, God asks his people to act better than the world around them.
2. Some other positives from this text:
- a. Everyone treated as valuable
 - 1) In each of these pairs, the ones who would've been most ignored are spoken to.
 - 2) Paul wasn't only talking to the dominant members of society.
 - 3) Wives, children, and slaves are given a voice; Jesus was for them too.
 - b. Christ reigns over all
 - 1) Everyone was asked to do something as if serving the Lord
 - 2) Scholar Nijay Gupta says, *"The lasting message of the household code is that the home should be a place where Christ reigns centrally and clearly. . . . Christ must be the Lord of the household, the one to whom each household member (whatever role given) is accountable."*
3. But there seems to be a common theme: each one is asked to be **VULNERABLE**.
- a. Each group is asked to place trust in another imperfect human being.
 - b. They're asked to open themselves up to the possibility of being hurt.
 - c. The lesser noticed of each relationship (wives, children, slaves) are asked to be vulnerable.
 - 1) They're asked to trust that those with the power would respond in kind.
 - d. And those who held the power (husbands, fathers, masters) were asked to be vulnerable.
 - 1) Paul requested they go against the cultural expectations.
 - 2) They are told to show kindness, agape love, and Christ-like humility.
 - 3) And if they maintain respect and they will receive Christ-like love in return.

CONCLUSION

1. **Why does Jesus win?** He demonstrated what he's asking of others: he was vulnerable.
 - a. He was a part of child/father pair—he was helpless as a baby and as a kid at the temple.
 - b. With his disciples he was a master and got to know them/serve them
 - *He even allowed one of them to betray Him because that led to His sacrifice for us.
 - c. Why does Jesus win? Remember back from the beginning of Colossians.
 - 1) Jesus had all the power but chose to express that power in humility. That's vulnerable.
 - 2) He continued to change the culture of his day and set a higher standard.
 - 3) He now calls us to that too; we're asked to be vulnerable.
2. Look at culture today: more and more people are accused of taking advantage of power.
 - a. Being vulnerable is the last thing we may want to do.
 - b. If you're in a "less than" demographic, you feel anxiety in being asked to be vulnerable.
 - c. But there's fear on the other side too. Few today respect vulnerable leadership.
 - d. We aren't called to be completely vulnerable with every single person in the world.
 - 1) Jesus said Matthew 10 that we should be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.
 - 2) Paul's vulnerability in Colossians was with familiar, committed relationships.
3. Still, you need to find some committed relationships where you can be vulnerable.
 - a. The other person in the relationship is being asked the very same thing.
 - b. There is much for all of us to learn from this, and hopefully grow from it.
 - c. God says this vulnerability honors Him. He wants it for some reason.
 - 1) He always wants the best for every us.
 - 2) So we can trust that, if he asks us to be vulnerable, then it's for good reasons.