

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2022**  
**Colossians 3:15-4:1**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Please do be seated

Let us come to God in prayer before we think about His word. Let us pray:

Holy Spirit we pray for you to come amongst us and soften our hearts to the word of God Holy Spirit come and shape our lives under the rule of Jesus come Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction for we ask it in Jesus' name amen

this past week we saw the next phase of president Putin's plans of invasion for Ukraine the world waits now with baited breath to see what will transpire that this is happening on our doorstep that this is happening to a country that really poses and seeks no threat no issue with Russia i think it leaves us all a little dumbfounded whatever the underlying motivations whatever the end goal what is clear to everyone is that we are seeing a world leader a ruler of a nation exercise his power in some of the worst ways imaginable now Putin is not the only world leader we could critique for their misuse of power and so in general i suspect we have a rather large distrust of leaders and the rule of leaders so when we come to a passage like the one today we might engage it with a whole lot of baggage a lot of distrust and criticism what is more our culture has vastly changed from Paul's day in his day slavery was part and parcel of everyday life and shame on us is still a part of modern day life but not to the same extent and the dynamics in families and the role of women have changed as well this means that we face a temptation as we approach our passage today we face the temptation to rubbish it or ignore it or skip over it or say it's an example of a text that exhorts a misuse and abuse of power and helps to maintain such power imbalances and structures

but if we go with that vein of thought and do not take the time to dig into these verses we will miss out what God was doing in that day and what God is seeking to do in our day through his word changing the world one life one mind one heart at a time and to get to grips with this passage we first need to appreciate the guiding thought to Paul's writing which is this the rule of Jesus shaping the lives of his people is good the rule of Jesus shaping the lives of his people is good maybe you think oh here goes Scott picking another idea of the thin air so let me explain where i get this from whenever we approach scripture to try and understand what the bible is teaching us there's a number of things we need to do and two of the things are this first we need to identify and look out for what is repeated what's the words that are repeated what are the ideas that are repeated second we need to be aware of the context of the writing and of the wider context of the scriptures so what's repeated Paul speaks of the peace of Christ the rule of Christ the name of the lord Jesus there's a repetition there the name of the lord is repeated six times in six verses and again there's a reference to Jesus as master in heaven so clearly whatever Paul is getting at Jesus is central to this Jesus is shaping this passage what's the context the context as we heard last week is the kingdom of God the kingdom of God shaping our lives clothing us to be fitting for the kingdom of God both now and for eternity and so it's the rule of Jesus shaping the lives not of society but of his people Paul is writing to God's people writing about how their shared activities help to shape their lives so he says we are shaped by the work and message of Jesus actually he says the peace and message of Jesus but I'll get to that in a

moment because i think he's speaking of the work and message of Jesus we're shared we're shaped by our shared activities our thankfulness our teaching our exhortation our singing together all this shapes us shapes us around Jesus and then Paul talks of being shaped by the reality of Jesus in those later verses children are to do what pleases the lord you can't please someone who doesn't exist and so it's be aware of the reality of Jesus he is real this is not just some guy in an old book or a history lesson he is real he is there or verse 23 that whatever we do we do it as working for the lord and that masters are to be mindful we've all to be mindful that we all have a master a lord in heaven and we will be accountable to him we are shaped and to be shaped by the reality of Jesus

and so what's guiding Paul's thinking is that the rule of Jesus is shaping and is to shape the lives of his people and i've added that that's good i think it's there in Paul's writing but you might be wondering well is it good really like if the bible includes such passages and such writings about wives submit to your husbands and slaves the whole regime of slavery doesn't get challenged in the scriptures is the rule of Jesus really good

well let's go back to context this God who made himself known in Jesus he wants to give grace and peace and strength to his people he's already given hope and redemption he has provided the means of forgiveness of sins at his own expense that he died on the cross nailed to that cross even when we were enemies of him in our minds chapter one of Colossians this same God who we're not enemies with now if we have faith in Jesus this same God has overcome the enemies we still face of death and sin and the devil and he did it for sake of you and me this is the God who did that that we might chapter 3 have life in him and our life might be hidden in him so that it is secure that we are part of his kingdom now and will be for all eternity this is the God who inspired such writings this is the God whose kingdom we're called to shape being this is the God who invites us to allow him to shape our lives and it is good and for our good

the wider scriptures also speak of the kingdom of God there's too many scriptures to pick on but I'll stick with Paul who says in romans for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness peace and joy in the Holy Spirit the kingdom of God the rule of Jesus is good he seeks to bring righteousness peace and joy to your life to this world that is his ultimate end goal

so Jesus is no Putin he's not even a Boris he's not akin to that boss that you know that was grumpy and dictating to you in the workplace Jesus is good and his desire to shape our lives is for our good so how are you going to approach his word today and the invitation to let him rule in your life will it be with trust and his goodness or will it be with criticism or a weariness maybe even a prideful disposition because it's so easy to think we know best isn't it it has been the plague of humanity since the beginning of time go back to the beginning of the biblical narrative Adam and Eve one thing not to do don't eat from the tree and yet they end up doubting the goodness of God God's holding something back from you and so they decide they know what's better and they disregard God they doubt his goodness and we and they have paid the price ever since

so how will you respond to God's word God's rule and his invitation today is it going to be with trust in his goodness trust to allow the rule of Jesus to shape your life

now Paul in particular in our verses today wants the rule of Jesus to shape our relationships and he names three areas of relationships, relationships within the church relationships within the family and then the master slave relationship those we are subject to or those who are subject to us and so beginning with the relationships within the church Paul says in verse 15 let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace and be thankful now when we read this verse we probably end up thinking about feelings and about us individually because as a society we are very feelings driven and we are very individualistic so we end up thinking that Paul is talking about some subjective peace that we've to let somehow rule in our hearts and that's often to guide our thing thinking and our feelings and our decisions if you've got peace in your heart then you're good it's probably how we often approach such language but it's not what Paul means Paul in the letter to Ephesians talks about the dividing wall between peoples between jew and gentile and in Galatians talks between not just jew and gentile but male and female slave and free there is this dividing wall

but now through Jesus through his work on the cross there is no division there needs to be no division that we can be reconciled to him and to one another and that is the peace he has won we are called to one body we are one body that is the peace that has been secured and for that peace for the people who make up that peace from all the different backgrounds of life we are to be thankful yes we need to be more thankful in general but that's not what Paul is to be thankful saying here it's in the context of being a body of recognizing that the people sitting around us the people who make up our fellowship the people who make up the Christian body beyond just our local congregation are people Jesus died for who were worthy apparently for him to die for

and that is to shape our thinking that is to shape our relating that is to shape the church now how do we keep that thought how do we maintain such an outlook or challenge behavior and ways of relating that are against that kind of thought well Paul says in verse 16 let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through Psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit

did you notice that it's addressed to you

as you teach and admonish not you the minister not you Paul the apostle you every one of us has a part to play in this

we've all to do that as we talk about our faith as we point one another to Jesus as we sing the songs of faith we remind ourselves about the reality of Jesus about who he is about his will and his teaching about his work on the cross and so we remember how to relate to one another and we allow the gospel to shape our living

so who's the person in church that gets under your skin it might be the minister

who's that person that's voice oh just greets you the wrong way who's that person with the outlook that's just so different from you and you can't understand them who's that person whose demeanor just gets you down who's that person with a theology that you think is dated or heretical or just doesn't belong here maybe it's time to be thankful for them

and how can we

talk about our faith so that we keep the gospel central that we keep pointing each other back to what Jesus has done and of his relevance in our lives and his presence in our lives so for example when you are meeting during the week or after the service maybe ask each other a question what did you take away from Sunday I think there's always something to take away I'm sure I've told the story before that when I was a young Christian i we went i was on a summer mission and we went to a service and i thought this old minister was talking the biggest lot of nonsense and I didn't understand a word I just had a really hard prideful heart and I ranted and raved after the service and my friend Laurie same age as me been a Christian for a bit longer uh he just said well this is all the stuff that I got and I was I have been challenged since then that you might not have agreed with my message or whoever's preaching but there will be something you can take away from the hymn from a prayer from a reading so focus on that maybe God's got something in that for you and then share that with someone else so that you build up their faith don't just keep it to yourself or maybe say to them how can i pray for you this week could we try and ask that question a bit more amongst one another because when you ask that question not just oh I'm thinking about you or how's your week going when we ask how can I pray for you we're reminding one another there is a God we can pray to that we're not on our own that this world might be looking like it's going to hell in a hand basket but there is a God and we can call to him and he cares for us

we are called to be a people who in our relationships point each other to Jesus keep the gospel central to all our relationships and all our decision making so that was the easy bit what about the rest of the passage that talks about those apparently maybe slightly dated very tricky verses relating to husbands and wives fathers and children slaves and masters well I'm not going to share an awful lot of hard and fast points of application on that section I'm afraid because in many ways we don't know the context of Paul's meaning here that when he says wives submit to your husbands as is fitting in the lord or husbands love your wives and do not be harsh to them what is Paul meaning and what is the context he writes into is he is he mindful because the commentaries are just all over the place on this um and i generally have a kind of I don't read every commentary but a fair number is he referring to as the situation like in Corinth where spouses were thinking about divorcing their other spouse because one was a believer and one wasn't a believer and they were worried was this marriage a bad thing is God against my marriage and Paul writes to say no stay in your marriage is that what it means to submit to your husband in that context or is Paul aware of a kind of behavior that is that is wrong and unhealthy is there manipulation going on in the side of the wife

maybe or something one or two commentators said that because there's that old adage and I'd never normally quote this because my wife would probably kill me um the man might be the head of the wife or the family but the wife is neck

she's in control really

literally there are books written on the subject matter here no matter which side of the debate you go for whether you think there is or is not a role for a husband to play a leadership function within a marriage

but let's notice a few things at least a few things that need named first of all Paul says that wives are to submit not obey it's children who are to obey parents and so there is no green light here for husbands to be controlling manipulative or violent and Paul also qualifies his statement that it is only as far as fitting in the lord what is fitting in the lord well let me just give you one example that we've already looked at that verse in romans that the kingdom of God is one of righteousness peace and joy and if there is none of that in your marriage if there are things happening in your marriage that are meaning that there is not righteousness peace or joy then there is something going wrong there

also to go back to the letter of Ephesians there's much more teaching there on this relationship between husband and wife and Paul says that the relationship between husband and wife echoes the relationship between Jesus and his church that he says that as Christ loved the church husbands are to love their wives but equally the church is to submit to Jesus to his rule his leadership that he is head of the church now submission in the context of Jesus in the church is an act of trust to submit to Jesus as an act of trust so is Paul simply meaning that wiser to trust their husbands to trust that their husbands will put them first and seek their best is that what he means

then there's what Paul says to husbands that they are to love their wives and not be harsh to them and in a culture where women were seen as little more than property as a thing that we were belittled by all faiths Paul is being very counter-cultural he is really shaking things up

and so though his words may seem dated aren't they still relevant today too which husband here loves their wife as Jesus loved the church how many of us men whether by our words or by the looks upon our faces or in our body language have communicated harshness to our wives this week

whatever Paul's getting at here ultimately in all these relationships it is about the gospel shaping them and husbands and wives whether married or single with children and a slave master relationship or in the church every relationship is to be shaped by the gospel so is it and with our children either your children or the children who attend church do we communicate the gospel so for example do we communicate to our children well you're only loved you're only appreciated we only want you here if you do as we tell you as you obey our rules

or do we communicate differently that you're loved as you are not as you ought to be not as you should have been not as you might become you are loved as you are

because isn't that the gospel that Jesus loved you despite you being a sinner despite you telling God to take a hike despite you being an enemy of God Colossians chapter one in your mind God died for you and me that's the gospel how is that gospel worked out in your relationships is Paul's point

so where might you embody the gospel and so embody the role of Jesus in your relationships

now despite what I've said despite the various caveats i've put on it some of us will still feel that Paul did not go far enough some of us will think that his teaching here propped up slavery for hundreds of years and that it still props up the subjugation of women

and why is whilst i would and will counter such claims we do need to acknowledge that the church has a shameful past when it comes to slavery and a shameful past when it comes to the treatment the care and the place of women too many a man too many a slave owner has taken these verses out of context and used them to justify sinful behavior men and women are equals in the sight of God made in the image of God loved equally by God

additionally the church has been woefully slow to change seem more to be playing catch up to wider society and then be maybe dragged into ways that are not of God because we are playing catch up we were called by Jesus to be salt and light to be salt and light and too often we have lost our saltiness

because salt not only preserves but it brings out flavor let's go back to romans 14 what is the flavor of the kingdom of God righteousness peace and joy we have not brought that out in society

and so I think it's right that as a church we now have a gender-based violence team and you might think that that is just a pandering to society where the church feels obligated to have such activities but i see it as part of our discipleship as part of what it means to pursue Jesus and embody the kingdom and i'll explain why in a moment and I'm glad that we now have that team as part of the discipleship team rightly so and in the coming months we hope to roll out some opportunities for you all if you wish to engage with that to understand more about gender-based violence why is this an issue why what does it lead to and how can we do something about that and i encourage you not to become skeptical about it and think it is a pandering to society but to see it as crucial to your discipleship and our day and to come and invest your time learning about gender-based violence because here's the thing

the changes that have come since Paul's day in relation to men and women slaves and free it all came about because of Jesus teaching an example and it was built upon by the early church and yes it was built upon by Paul Paul's teaching as it relates to home

life as it relates to the slave master relationship was vastly different to his culture to not see people as things as property to not only value men and the free and Paul's day he was incredibly egalitarian he would have been vilified for such a position

and whilst you may think he did not go far enough i found this quote helpful in one of the commentaries this week Paul does not protest against the institution of slavery or the dynamic between men and women and we should admit that his approach is subtler he has found a fixed point on which to stand from which to move the world slaves too are human beings slaves too are people Jesus died for women are people who Jesus died for all are loved all our people all are valued

and Paul's teaching began to change the world maybe not fast enough for you maybe too slowly often times not appreciated often times ignored or thwarted but it was the Christian faith which gave the impetus to value people differently it was the Christian faith which would lay the foundation upon which wider change would come in society and to the dynamics between men and women

from the Christian faith things began to move in the world

so what about your life and your context where are we called to put the work and message of Jesus into practice in our relationships such that the world moves

it might not seem like much with all that's going on in the news it might not seem like much but every choice matters every choice moves the world that little bit more towards the kingdom of God because did you notice all the little words of action in the passage let teach sing do it all submit love obey provide they're all action words and they're all words that require you and me to make a choice to exert our will our power not to dominate as a Roman dictator does a Russian dictator does

but to use our power to allow Jesus to rule in us and through us that the hallmarks of his kingdom might be seen in our day in our lives in our relationships in our community

that then the rule of Jesus might shape more and more lives for the good it might not seem like much but every choice is a choice to help the world move

and that happens one life at a time one mind at a time one heart at a time i pray that we make that choice today and every day may it be so. Amen.