

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Clifford Baptist Church, Amherst, Virginia
Rev. Dr. Michael R. Fitzgerald, Senior Pastor

(Transcription from the Morning Service that was Streamed Live)

Sermon: "The Heavenly Lord In Human Relationships"
Scripture: Colossians 3:20 – 4:1 (King James Version)

Today is a new day and a different day in the way that we're doing things. The sanctuary is empty today, but we're so grateful and thankful that you are joining us by streaming this service, and I know that truly our sanctuary is full and will be full. Last week's sermon garnered over 3,700 views, so I know that our outreach for the Lord is continuing to move forward. While our room here is empty, our hearts are full knowing that there are many, many who are joining us today and thank you for being with us and be sure as our service closes today that you share it so others can also watch it as well through the week.

As we get started this morning, let me say that it does appear through the month of April that this is going to be our pattern. Our Governor has put out a new guidance this week about 10 or less in our services. And so, obviously, through the month of April this is going to be our pattern—this covers Easter. But we're looking for some new things to happen. But the good news is that we continue to pray for this time of separation that physically is going to be done one of these days, and we'll be together again. We know that's going to happen.

But let me tell you about something special that we are developing. Next Sunday, of course, is Palm Sunday. I am very certain that we will be worshipping just like this next week on Palm Sunday. But I'm going to ask you to do something today—we'll send out a reminder this week. Next week, Palm Sunday, is our regular service for the Lord's Supper, and I will have a Palm Sunday sermon—a message connected with the cross of Jesus and then we're going to share the Lord's Supper together. I'm reminding you this morning to have your bread and your cup ready wherever you are—by your television screen, your I-pad screen, have your Lord's Supper ready and we will share that together at the close of the service next week, Palm Sunday.

Also, this is a huge announcement especially for our young families and our children. Of course, year by year, Gwen and I hosted the Easter Egg Hunt at our home. Because of what is happening in these days, we're not going to be able to do that but we have another plan that is developing that we want you to know about right now. This is for the Saturday before Easter Sunday—April 11. We are going to be planning

something special on that Saturday. It is called an “Easter Eggstraordinaire.” We’re going to have a drive-through on the church property. You’ll come in on one side and drive all the way around the perimeter of the property and as you leave there will be a devotional opportunity at the big cross outside of the parsonage. We’re going to have a time together for our children that they can come through our property and they can have some fun. But also at the end of our time together, we’re going to direct you to a devotional message that’s going to tie together the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb. It will all come together; we want you to be a part of that. But that “Easter Eggstraordinaire” drive-through is going to be open from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. So there’s a four hour window for you to come be with us. Of course, we want you to spread the news to our community. All of the families in our community are certainly welcome to come join us for that day. And according to the planners of this, the word I got is that it’s going to be unlike *anything Amherst County has ever seen!* I don’t know exactly what that means but you’ll have to join us and see for yourself.

Before I get into the sermon, one more note I want to tell you. I ran into one of our church members yesterday, Jim Saunders. Jim was talking about our streaming and how it’s working, and he said I actually have an item of good news and an item of bad news to tell you. I said all right--let’s start with the good news. He said “the good news is for me whether I’m in front of my computer screen or right there on the property of Clifford Baptist Church, I can still get a good nap in the middle of your sermon.” Thank you very much, Jim Saunders! Amy, keep him awake today! The item of bad news, he said, is he missed being late for Sunday School! And of course we know our Sunday School is not happening right now. However, I want to use that as a sequeway to say that there are some Sunday School lessons available online for you to access. Derek Keiser was here this past week and taped a Sunday School lesson out of Acts, Chapter 20. I saw it; it was an excellent lesson. If you haven’t seen it, you can access it sometime today and have a Sunday School lesson along with our worship service. I understand there are other teachers in our church who are going to be creating Sunday School lessons for you to see on a weekly basis as well as we go through these days. So, good things are happening. This Coronavirus is *not* going to stop ministry at Clifford Baptist Church. We’re grateful that you are here with us this day.

I’m going to continue on in a sermon series as I have been preaching through the Books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. It’s a four book study; I’m getting toward the end of it now. We’re in the book of Colossians. This has been called our “GE Power Company” study—*G E P C*: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. For those of you who are visiting with us today, this is getting toward the end of a long sermon series that I have created over these days.

Today, we’re going to finish Chapter 3 of Colossians as we study God’s basic building block of society. God’s first institution that He created was the institution of family. We know that family is crucially

important to our society and to the creation of family units through our life that we know are so important to every one of us. Also today, as we finish looking at the family unit in Colossians Chapter 3 there's another relationship I'm going to cover in this sermon. And that has to do with our work relationships—who we work for and who we work with and how that relationship in working in our lives is to be an offering to God. Even with this virus that is going through our society, we worship together. Yes, it's in a little different way today and in Sundays to come. Most of us are not physically in the sanctuary today but, praise God, we're worshipping together through media and we're together in that way. But listen friends, even though we might be worshipping together in a different way, the church is still the church. And the church still has a gospel to proclaim in every day that we live. Can I get a collective "Amen" on that? We're grateful to know the church is still the church and even when our days are challenged, we are to carry the gospel into the world because there are so many who need it. There are so many today who need it in our society—people who are scared, people who are fearful, people who need the love, grace, and peace of Jesus Christ in their life in a special way in this day. So the church remains the church, and we take that good news to the world.

In the very best week, however, as we think of collectively being the church we know we are together in any given week—maybe three to five hours a week as we gather as the church body on Sundays, on Wednesdays, for other meetings. Three to five hours probably is a good week for us as we come to the church. But when we think about our families, we realize we are connected together as a family unit a hundred and sixty-eight hours of the week. So the family is crucially important in the life of Christ, in the life of ministry. Today we know God commissions us as the church to share the gospel. But remember this as well: the Bible commissions us as families to share the gospel—to live the life of Jesus Christ so that we as families can be a witnessing unit in this world that needs the love of Christ.

As Paul addresses the family in the Book of Colossians, he says there is a proper and godly rank and order if our families are to be godly. And the way the order our family works is # one--first and foremost, Jesus Christ is the head of every family. If we're going to be living in the pattern of the way God created us to be family, Jesus has to be the head of every family unit. If we're to be the family God created us to be, then Jesus Christ is the head of the family first and foremost. All of the family strives to follow Him and to live for Him and to live under His word of guidance. Then, as we allow Jesus to be the head of our family the order of the family is this—in the physical arrangement of the family, the husband and the father is to be the spiritual head of the family. He is to love Jesus Christ and to follow Him and he is the one who provides the headship to the family in a physical way. He is the spiritual leader of the family. He sets the pace for the family to travel in the love of Jesus Christ, to worship Him, to serve Him, to be that family for Him. In that role of headship and leadership of the family, the husband and father earns the respect, the love, and the help of his wife. They then walk together as a team serving Jesus and leading that family in the lifestyle of Jesus

Christ. The husband is no better than the wife; the wife is not lesser than her husband but rather the husband and wife live together, work together, and walk together as a team in Christ. But the husband is the one who is commissioned by God to set the spiritual pace for his family under the headship of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The greatest, most blest home in all of the world is established in the Lord. The Lord is the foundation of that home. That home can be effective and loving together as they gather unto the love of Christ and serve Him as a unit, as a team in this world as witnesses. Also on the ground floor is this: that couple and that family need to be in the church. I believe when Jesus Christ created the church, He created it so that every believer could be part of a believing family so that the family is connected together by love of Christ. I believe that every Christian should be a part of the church. But I also believe this: that every Christian family should have the church within their home—that the Lord Jesus Christ is honored and worshipped inside of the home.

In the last sermon in Colossians I spoke to you about Chapter 3, verses 18 and 19—God’s word concerning the husband and wife. Today, we’re going to move forward in that study. By God’s grace, many couples are blessed with children. And couples take on the responsibility to raise their children in the right way. In order to do that, we’re going to provide them food, clothing, shelter, protection, education and all of the things that tie in with being the parents God wants us to be. But I want to say this to you parents of children: They are the principal people in your entire life to whom you are to give the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our children are one of the greatest mission fields God has ever entrusted to us as families; we’re to lead those children to the Lord Jesus. Do not fail, parents, do not fail your children there. The greatest joy and the greatest victory of parenthood is when we see our sons and daughters come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, following our footsteps. As we lay that track, as we lay that pathway for our children to follow—when they follow Moms and Dads to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is the greatest victory of being a parent.

God give us His word through Paul in this book of Colossians about our children. Turn with me to Colossians, Chapter 3. Right now we’re going to look at verses 20 and 21. Keep your Bible open; I will go further than that this morning. Verses 20 and 21 of Colossians 3 say this: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” Let’s think about those two verses for a moment. There is much to be said about children’s rights these days and we hear that around every corner. Let me give you two basic rights that every child should have: The first basic right of a child is that he or she has the right to be born into life. That right has been taken away from many, many children. Since 1973, over 63 million children have lost that right to live. Isn’t that a sad figure? Today, I do not take away from the hundreds of people who are suffering from this Coronavirus—for the many people who are in the hospital and for the deaths that have resulted because of this pandemic going through our world. I don’t take away from that—we pray for God to deliver us and heal

us from that but I do remind you of this: While we're losing hundreds and hundreds to a pandemic, I want you to remember that in every day of our life in the United States of America, we lose over 2,000 children. That's since 1973—that pandemic has gone on close to 50 years. We need to stand up for the right of children to be born, for the right of children to live. That's their first right, and it is a right that is given to them by God. We need to stand up for that. The second right that a child has is this: To be raised in a loving, caring stable home. That is the base level of the Bible. God gave Adam and Eve marriage when He created them. He created the foundation for raising children in a godly home—a home where the Lord is honored, a home where godly parents will raise and love and discipline their children that they may be raised in the love of God giving them wisdom, giving them guidance in every turn of life.

In Colossians, Chapter 3, verse 20 it says give children one sole responsibility. Our children's one responsibility is to obey their parents. I think that's an interesting thing to teach our children—that they are to obey their parents. That model of God, a child growing up in obedience to godly parents who are teaching them the right things and teaching them a life of righteousness is absolutely necessary for the life of a child. Of course, we learn from birth to our final days on earth we're learning something every day. But God says the first learning curve for a child is to obey their parents. Children learn from birth to live under the proper authority of their Moms and Dads—that's the beginning of their learning to obey their parents. As they grow, they learn what it means to grow up in obeying other aspects of their life. As they learn to obey their parents, they also learn to obey their teachers. As they learn to obey their parents, they also learn to obey the law. As they continue to grow up, they learn from obeying their parents that they're to treat others with respect because they have been treated with respect by their parents. As they grow up, they learn to live under the authority of their employers. As they grow, they learn to live under the authority of word of God and it begins by obedience to their parents. The greatest obedience is when they come to Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Savior understanding that He went to a cross and He rose from the grave that we may have life everlasting. We want to enter into that relationship of obedience to a Savior who lives in us. It begins with obedience to the parents that children grow into learning the proper authorities of life. Ultimately, a godly home leads them to Jesus—how important that is as parents that we give our children that firm foundation. Their walk of obedience learns them to independently grow up to be men and women of good character, men and women of righteousness, men and women who will choose to do the right thing as people of God themselves because they have followed their parents to Jesus Christ. It all starts in the home.

I want you to notice a word we find here in Colossians 3, verse 21—fathers notice this word in a special way: “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” That's an interesting verse; actually the word for fathers here in Greek is “pater.” The transliteration is “pater.” The reason it's interesting to me is that exact word is used in Hebrews, Chapter 11, verse 23. Here's what that verse says: “By faith Moses,

when he was born, was hid three months of his parents.” So the word “pater” in Colossians 3 is translated “fathers” and in Hebrews 11 it is translated “parents.” What we see here is a grammatical possibility that perhaps this word can be “Parents, don’t discourage your children.” I think “fathers” here is very fitting as the word that is to be used in this verse. It is correct, and it is accurate. The reason I believe that is because fathers, you and I have a great bearing on the futures of our children. Mothers are natural-born nurturers. Fathers, we are to be those men in our children’s lives in particular that give them special direction, guidance, and discipline from time to time—guiding our children in love.

My Dad has been gone over 19 years, and I think about him every day. I think about the good things that happened between us; sometimes I think about the bad things that happened between us. I can tell you one thing I always hated to hear my Dad say: “Son, I’m going to work on the car; you come help me.” I knew what that meant—it always meant I was going to hold the flashlight so he could see down in that engine to get that part he needed fixed. But the sad truth of the matter is this: I never could hold the flashlight in the right place. It never turned out well when I helped my Dad holding a flashlight into the engine of a car. Those are memories of that day that weren’t so pleasant, but they’ve become funny to me now. My son, Gabe, is watching this streaming today and I imagine he can relate that same thought—that he never held a flashlight really well for me either. But those are things that happen between Dads and sons. For me, the greatest accomplishment in my young life was when my Dad smiled and patted me on the back for a job well done in something that we did together. Dads, you play a critical role in the lives of your children. As we think about the charge to both parents, we know that every parent has a critical role in their child’s life.

I am truly amazed this verse is directed to “we fathers” – that we play such a role in our sons’ and daughters’ lives. Dads, discipline your children but don’t discourage your children. That’s the word we see here in Colossians 3, 21: “Provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” Discipline in love—you know, a child with a broken spirit will easily fall prey to Satan. We have to be careful how we discipline our children in that we discipline but we also build them up in love. I’ve often heard it said that if a child does not feel love and encouragement in their home, they will find it somewhere else and sometimes in very unhealthy patterns. It’s very important, parents, that we raise our children in a godly way.

So consider your child, parents, as the greatest ministry and mission opportunity that God gives you and me in life—to bring our children to the love of Jesus Christ. Remember this, parents, it’s never too late. If your children are grown and gone out of the house, we can still make a godly impact on those whom God gave to us to raise up and to continue to be Moms and Dads through the extent of our lives. Parents, always strive no matter the age of your child to make a godly impact there.

As we get to this point in Colossians, Chapter 3, Paul changes gears. We're going to look at one other relationship that Paul addresses in the passage—employer and employee. This is an important passage for most of us, so let's read it together. Colossians, Chapter 3, 22, Paul says this: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." Chapter 4, verse 1: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."

As we think about these few words—we live in a day and in an age where these words don't directly apply to us. Slavery by coercion has long died from us and has been abolished. But the concept of voluntary and household slavery was not condemned or condoned in the Bible; it was just a fact of life in the first century when this letter was written as well as centuries prior to that. Slavery in the Roman Empire was just something that was accepted. In fact, history tells us the Roman Empire has somewhere between four and five million residents—20 to 40% of all the residents of the Roman Empire were slaves. So this word from Paul in Colossians, Chapter 3, and in the first verse of Chapter 4 apply directly to his day. Interestingly, we know the relationship of one literally owns another human being. It was a very unequal human relationship—one man literally owning another man. But here's where Paul ties in the gospel. He says when a master and a slave both come to Jesus Christ as Savior, then the slave relationship of owner and slave is overcome because of the equality Jesus brings—bringing them together not as master and slave but as brothers. And they are on equal ground at the foot of the cross as two saved men—master and slave alike.

Paul's word was groundbreaking—it was something never heard of before that a master and a slave through Christ were equals; it was a complete reversal of the relationship that was understood in the culture of the day. Paul's word to these believers—he's talking to Christian believing people in masters and slaves. Paul's word to the believing slave was to obey the master's will and rule in the life. Work hard, do not work grudgingly but always put a positive spin on your work not because you're working so much as a "manpleaser" of your master but because you're working to please Jesus Christ, the true Master. Do your best in your work environment to please Jesus, the Master of your life. Work hard because you're working in the field of Jesus Christ. So Paul says look at your productive work, not so much as obedience to a human master but rather as trustworthy service to your true Master, in Jesus Christ. Stay true, stay strong in Jesus even as you work.

Look at Colossians 3, verse 23, again: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Skip down to Colossians, Chapter 4, verse 1—Paul teaches the master to treat his slave, that Christian

slave, with fairness and equality. That's a huge statement of progress in the word of God speaking to the culture of that day—to treat a slave with equality had never been heard of. To treat a slave with justice was something that just didn't happen; a slave was just a piece of property. Paul says no, he's your brother now. Treat your slave with justice; treat your slave even with love because of the love Christ has given to each one of us. Give dignity to that person who is working for you.

I love the way Paul reminds the Christian slave owner—you might own a slave but remember you're a servant, too. Verse 1 of Chapter 4: "Master" speaking out to the Christian Master—"give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." Paul reminds that slave owner that he, too, is a slave to Jesus Christ his Savior—a bond slave, one that serves the Lord with love through the grace that is given to him through Jesus Christ.

Certainly, we don't live in a nation that tolerates slavery anymore but this word is not dead. The word of God is living, no matter what it might be embracing in the moment. It lives to teach us that we have a word of teaching that applies to directly to us. As Paul is talking to masters and slaves, he's also talking to us. We need to apply this word to our own lives. If you're a boss in your work relationship, treat your employees; treat those who working for you and with you with respect, dignity, justice, and fairness. That's what Paul is saying to those who have someone under them—treat them with dignity, treat them with wisdom and fairness. Remember, the Master of heaven is guiding the boss—the one who has authority over someone else. You are serving the Master of heaven as you're relating to those under you and your authority. If you are under the authority of someone else in the way of an earthly boss, you give your best in an honest and trustworthy and obedient day's labor for that boss because you are representing Jesus Christ in the work that you are performing. You're representing the good character of Jesus Christ as you give an honest day's labor for an honest day's pay. We know we are to represent Jesus Christ even in the work environment. We are to be trustworthy and upstanding, and we're to give our very best in the way we give labor—because we're giving our labor ultimately to serve the Lord.

Paul covers a lot of relationship territory here in Colossians, Chapter 3, verses 18 through Colossians 4:1. Husbands, wives, children, family and even our work world relationships. The Lord is giving us guidance to important relationships we have in our life. Husbands and wives, my question to you today is—my challenge to you today is will you walk in the Lord Jesus Christ together as husband and wife. Husbands, will you take the responsibility to be the spiritual leader of your home and your family? Will you set the spiritual pace of your family? Will you see to it that your family worships together and is reminded of the Lord's love together day after day and your authority as the husband and father? I pray you men will

rededicate your lives to the Lord Jesus Christ in the way you live in and work in the families. I pray that the wife will want to be the helpmeet to her husband and you walk together in ministry; you are a ministry team.

In every wedding I've done, especially in recent days, I've reminded that brand new couple who is coming together under the grace of Jesus Christ to be married that they are to be no longer individuals but they have been put together by God as a team. God put them together as husband and wife for many, many reasons—for family, home, maybe children—but to be a team of service. They can do more in service to the Lord Jesus Christ together than they could do separately. My prayer, husbands and wives listening today, is that you will rededicate your life to be that team of ministry. I also pray you will be a blessing to your children, that you will reach out to them in the love and in the guidance and wisdom and even in discipline of the Lord Jesus Christ that they will obey and they will learn the basic building blocks of what it means to be a human being who wants to practice righteousness and godliness in their own lives as they are growing up.

So, parents, will you reach your babies, will you reach your children? Perhaps there's a time right now to reach your grown children and make an impact for Jesus Christ in their lives. It's so very important; it's one of the most important outreaches of your entire Christian life—to reach your children.

Then, too, we realize whatever work we're entrusted with in these days we're to do it as we do it unto the Lord as a labor of love, as a labor that puts forth the character of Jesus and gives us our very best energy in whatever He puts before us to do.

So believers this scripture today teaches us that our service to Jesus Christ goes far beyond a church pew. It goes beyond our lives, our home, community, our work world. Wherever we might be, we're to be a witnessing unit for the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, I pray that we will rededicate our marriages, rededicate our homes, rededicate our church ministry and rededicate our parenting skills and our work skills to be used for Jesus Christ. Someone told me one of the greatest outreaches he's ever had in his workplace is that he leaves a Bible on his desk and many, many people have seen that Bible over the course of time. Many of us are not able to leave a Bible where we work, but if we have the opportunity to do that it would be a wonderful outreach. But serve the Lord Jesus Christ however he calls you to serve Him.

As I draw this sermon to a close and as we rededicate our lives to families, to homes, and even to the work world my prayer is that we will be faithful to serve Jesus Christ. But today, all of this scripture has been directed to people who know Jesus as Lord and Savior. If you are joining us for worship today and you've never come to Jesus Christ as your Savior, the conclusion of my sermon is this: I'm inviting you to Him.

We're coming up on the Easter season now, and we realize this is most joyous time of year. But it starts with Good Friday when Jesus, literally the Son and the Lamb of God, died on the old rugged cross and shed his blood there as the Perfect Son so that imperfect people can be saved and forgiven. Jesus took our place on the cross of punishment that you and I might be forgiven.

If you've never come to him, he's inviting you to come to know Him as your Lord and your Savior because he died on the cross for you, that you might be forgiven. Also, never forget that on the third day he rose again. We do not worship a dead Savior on a cross; we worship the living Savior who rose from the grave—who lives today, who joins us today however you're worshipping or wherever you're worshipping today Jesus Christ is joining you there. If you've never received Him, you can simply come to Him and say: Lord Jesus, I believe you died on the cross for me and I believe on Easter morning you arose from the grave that I might have eternal life. I want to put my life in your hands. I open my heart for you to be my Savior and my Lord, and in all things, Lord, in my family, in my personal life, to my work world I will follow the footsteps of Jesus. I invite you to Him.

I'm so grateful we can worship together today, even in a way that's a little strange than the way we've done it in the past. But, praise God, we hear His word today and it speaks to us.

Let's pray together: Our Father and our God, I thank You for these moments of worship Lord. Thank You for the pen of Paul two thousand years ago, inspired by God, to teach us about what it means to truly be the family You created. To truly be the husband and wife You want us to be. To truly be the parents and the children You want us to be. Our relationship in the world even extends to our work world as we go out into the community, Lord. I pray that we will rededicate our lives to be Your witnesses and Your ministers and Your representatives wherever life takes us. Thank You, Lord that this word is a living word and it has spoken to us today and it has spoken to me this week. Father, I pray for that one who needs Jesus as Lord and Savior today he or she cannot walk to this altar and receive You in this church building. But Lord, they can receive You right where they are in their living room, in their car, wherever they're listening to this sermon, Lord, they can receive You accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior simply by saying "I am a sinner, Jesus, but I believe You died for me on the cross and You took away my sin. You died in my place, and You rose from the grave to give me eternal life. Lord Jesus, I believe it and I accept You as my Savior this moment." And this moment, Jesus will move into your heart and give you eternal life and a new purpose and a new reason for living. Bless us, Father, as we approach Your altar of grace and rededication and salvation this morning. Thank You for loving us. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.