

## Sermon Script: Christ is the Head of This House

Scripture: Colossians 3:18–4:1

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you.

When you walk into a Christian bookstore, in the gift section, you will see this thing, or maybe you are visiting a Christian friend's home, you'll most likely see this same thing, or similar, hanging on the wall or door — this is probably one of the most common decorations in Christian homes. It has this phrase inscribed on it, this might be carved on a nice piece of wood, glowing under the light; or maybe it's printed on porcelain; or perhaps it's cross-stitched with cute little lambs or flowers around it. (Sorry yesterday I search everywhere and couldn't find the Farsi version, I should ask Les for help.)

The phrase, "Christ is the head of This house" is very familiar to us.

We all love buying a sign like this and hanging it in the most prominent place in the living room, usually above the TV or on the entryway, as if to proclaim our family's faith to all visiting guests. Why do we do this? Because we hope this statement is true. We hope that the loving and powerful Lord Jesus will protect our home, bless us with safe comings and goings, make our children obedient, and bring harmony to our marriage.

But, dear brothers and sisters, hanging up this sign is easy; it only takes a nail, a hammer, and three minutes. But we must honestly ask ourselves this question: when we hang this plaque on the wall, is Christ *really* the Lord in our living room, our kitchen, and bedroom? When husband and wife are arguing heatedly over finance, when children challenge our bottom line with rebellion, when the frustrations of work are brought home—is this phrase a truthful declaration, or merely a sarcastic decoration?

To transform this phrase from a cold decoration on the wall into a "living truth" in our home, what price must be paid? Could it be that this demands a lifetime of effort, countless tears, or even the agonizing pain of deep personal struggle?

Today, we will read this passage in Colossians together and share thoughts over it. Before we delve into it, please allow me to point this one thing out: how many types of relationships are mentioned in this passage? Three. Husband and wife, parents and children (specifically father and son), and master and servant. Now this is very interesting because, how does the Bible describe the relationship between us and God?

Most frequently, it mentions that the relationship between us and God is that of a Father and children.

2 Corinthians 6:18 (NLT) "And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

If you recall, last time I told you the story of Samuel the Prophet. Little Samuel had never heard God call him before, so when he heard God's call, he didn't know how to respond. His teacher Eli taught him how to respond when hearing God speak:

1 Samuel 3:9 (NLT) So he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed.

The Bible also uses the relationship of husband and wife to describe the relationship between Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:25 (NLT) For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her.

Ephesians 5:31–32 (NLT) As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.

Therefore, although our scripture today speaks of three relationships that are common among us, these three relationships point precisely to the relationship between us and God. The spiritual meaning here is very rich. It's not merely about teaching us how to manage interpersonal relationships in the world. Moreover, how we manage these interpersonal relationships will affect our relationship with God. So, the focus of our reading today is "Relationship."

This passage in Colossians is often called the "Household Codes." In the era of Paul the Apostle, many households included servant-master relationships. Frankly speaking, in our era which emphasizes individualism and absolute equality, this scripture might sound a bit "jarring" to the ear, and might even raise some people's blood pressure. Can we really apply what the scripture says to our lives?

There is a word we have been emphasizing in our sermons these past few weeks, the very first word of chapter three: "Therefore" (or "Since then").

Because in Colossians chapters one and two, Paul not only expounds the supremacy of Christ—that He is the Creator, Redeemer, and Head of the Church; He is "the visible image of the invisible God," the Creator and Sustainer of all things (1:15-20). Christ reconciled humanity to God through the cross; redemption is complete (1:21-23). All wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ; He is the center of the Christian life. Furthermore, Paul refuted heresies, warning believers not to be deceived by empty philosophy, legalism, or asceticism, because these deviate from Christ (2:8-23).

Then at the beginning of chapter three, Paul says "Therefore". "Therefore" you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven (3:1-4). "

Therefore" put off the old and put on the new nature (3:5-17). Because you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Only then do we arrive at the scripture we are reading today. What does that "new nature" (new man) look like? Would this new man only show up when singing hymns in church during Sunday worship? Would this new man also show up in our kitchens, bedrooms, and offices?

Because of the word "Therefore," this is not a passage that can be extracted and understood apart from its context. This is not a scripture demanding submission in a home with domestic violence. No. There must be context.

Colossians 3:18 (NLT) Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.

Alright, let's look into the scripture, verse 18. First, this is not a submission of "all women" to "all men," but of "wives" to "their own husbands." Then, the word "submit" (Hupotasso) in Greek is a military term, meaning "to put oneself under..." This does not refer to a lower status; it does not mean the wife is lower than the husband, because in Galatians 3:26-28, it is clear that this does not involve a difference in status or ability, but rather a functional order. The wife, already possessing equality and dignity, willingly plays the role of a "helper" within the family order. A wife's submission should be an "active self-denial" rather than passive compliance. God calls wives to submit, actually to take care the pride within us that says, "I must in control of everything, or this family will fall apart."

Next, the scripture mentions that the prerequisite for submission is that it is "fitting for those who belong to the Lord." Now that is an absolute boundary. Obedience to one's husband is based on our prior obedience to the Lord. Therefore, if a husband asks the wife to do anything against God's will—such as falsifying accounts, lying, or cease to worship God —the wife must gently but firmly refuse, because as Acts 5:29 implies: "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

In the same way, the Bible never condones any form of domestic violence or abuse. If a wife is suffering from domestic violence, the church must intervene to protect her, and the wife should seek safety; this is absolutely not a violation of the teaching of submission.

Submission is not "keeping my mouth shut," nor is it about giving up thinking. Submission is not about abandoning oneself, becoming a person without opinions, a doormat. Submission is an attitude; it is choosing to express your opinions and wisdom in a respectful way. For example, regarding major family decisions, actively seek your

husband's opinion and express your support for his leadership. When opinions differ, avoid humiliating him in front of children or outsiders, instead, choose to communicate gentle words in private.

Abigail in 1 Samuel is a model of wisdom. When her foolish husband Nabal almost brought about a fatal disaster to the family, she did not blindly obey, but took proactive action with respect and wisdom, saving her family.

So, submission is an attitude from the heart: Does the wife honor her husband's position in her heart? Is the wife willing to lay down her own insistence, support her husband's leadership, and allow him to take up the responsibility before the Lord?

Colossians 3:19 (NLT) Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

Next, verse 19. Husbands, please note, the Bible's requirement for you is actually higher than the requirement for wives. God requires husbands to "love" their wives. The "love" here in Greek is *Agape* — God's love that is selfless and sacrificial.

Many brothers misunderstand this, thinking that love means spoiling, making the wife happy, satisfying all her demands, giving her whatever she wants. No! This "Love" is sacrifice. It is choosing to love when you don't want to; choose to love when you feel she doesn't deserve it; choose to love even when you are tired or aggrieved.

Paul pushes this standard of love to the extreme in Ephesians 5:25: "Just as Christ loved the church and gave up his life for her." Love is self-sacrifice; it is the death of the self. What does "gave up his life for the church" mean? Christ gave up heavenly glory and even His life for the church.

Brothers, when was the last time you gave up something for your wife? What was the last thing you gave up for your wife? Not just earning money to support the family; that is a basic responsibility. I am asking, have you ever given up your pride for her? Give up your time watching the game for her? Give up your superior "head of the household" attitude for her?

Furthermore, the scripture says "never treat them harshly." "Harshly" in the original text carries the meaning of "becoming sour or angry," or "embittering," this includes severe, cold treatment. It can be cold violence, emotional blackmail, constant verbal belittling, etc. Today, many husbands, especially in Chinese families, they do not hit people, but they are experts at "Cold War"—the husband is as cold as frost, the wife is sharp as a blade, and the atmosphere in the house could freeze someone to death. Punishing the other with silence, expressing dissatisfaction by ignoring them—this is "treat them harshly", and the Bible opposes that!

The church is often weak and stumbles, but Christ never waged a "Cold War" against the church for three days and three nights; He always actively seeks opportunity for gentle restorations.

Let us ask a question: Why are the requirements for husbands and wives different?

Why doesn't the Bible say, "You wives, love your own husbands," and then "Husbands, love your wives"? Or, "You wives, submit to your own husbands," and then "Husbands, submit to your wives"? Equality! Either both are responsible for loving, or both are responsible for submitting—wouldn't that be fair? Wouldn't that be simple? Why does the Bible create this division of work? Why make it so complicated? This is not fair.

Well, in the same household, there are many different equipment and facilities. These different facilities were created for different functions. A sink should not say to a toilet, "You use water, I use water. You can hold a tank of water and flush it, I can too. Why do you have a lid and I don't? Why do people in this house always go to you for relieving themselves and not to me? This is not fair." The sink shouldn't say that. They were not created for that kind of fairness.

God knows the humans He created too well. He knows how to save them. God knows where men stumble the most, and God knows where women struggle the most. So these two commands given by the Bible are actually precision strikes.

Paul says to the wife: Your problem is that you are unwilling to submit, not content to submit, always wanting to be in charge—it's been that way since the garden of Eden. Therefore, you must learn to submit; for you, this is self-denial.

Paul says to the husband: Your problem is that you don't understand love, don't know how to love, and don't love deeply enough. Therefore, you must learn to love; for you, this is self-denial.

Actually, what both husband and wife need to learn is to be like Christ.

Wives, the next time your husband wants to change his jobs, invest the unknown, or making a decision you think is super dumb, could you refrain yourself to say, "Honey, that's so stu..., I mean, if we listen to you, the whole family will be in trouble"? No, don't say that. You practice self-denial, and say, "If this is your decision, I respect it, but could you please listen to my view before making the final decision?"

Husbands, the next time your wife says to you, "I need you to listen to me, no explanations, and don't give me advice, just listen. If I say you haven't hugged me once on your own initiative this week, don't explain, just listen." Do not say, " Honey, that's so stu..., I mean, wasting time." No, don't say that. You practice self-denial, and say, "Okay, you speak, take your time, I am listening."

Relationship. The purpose of marriage, from this perspective, is to serve as a visible demonstration of Christ's sacrificial love for the church and the church's dedication to Christ. If God's will is to make our marriage a holy drama, intended to act out the relationship of "Christ and the Church" to this fallen world —the husband entrusted to play the role of Christ, the wife entrusted to play the role of the church— will the observers around us feel inspired to embrace Christianity because what they witness in our relationship?

Does the way we show love reveal the nature of Christ's love?

Does our willingness to submit showcase the church's grace and beauty?

The most common deadlock in marriage is: the wife is waiting for the husband to love enough, and the husband is waiting for the wife to submit well enough. Both stand still. But brothers, if you are willing to give yourself up for your wife's benefit just as Christ gave himself for the church—sacrificing your comfort, your interests, washing dishes for her, taking bullets for her, sacrificing your self-centeredness for her—you will find that for her, "submission" will no longer be such a difficult thing.

Brothers and sisters, if you want your marriage to be healthy, can you do this one thing before going to bed tonight? A super simple thing. Go to your husband, go to your wife, look into each other's eyes, and seriously say one sentence, just four words: "I want to learn." You don't need to explain what you want to learn, nor do you need to say I love you or sorry or anything like that, just four words "I want to learn."

You will say, "that's it"? Yes. That's it.

These words are very important. I ask you to say these words not because my title is the associate pastor of education and discipleship. but because there is magic in these words. This statement is a declaration to God, a declaration to yourself, and also a declaration to the other person. You admit you are imperfect; you admit you need to grow. Behind this statement is a broken heart, a heart willing to take the first step. That's why these four words have magic; it can break the deadlock. You are inviting the other person to grow with you, to become better together, and to grow the relationship to become more intimate.

Before we continue, let me repeat today's keyword: "Therefore." Because Christ has already done that for us, "Therefore," we must do this. The second keyword is "Relationship." The relationship between husband and wife is an expression of a heavenly relationship on earth, and God has requirements for the expression of this relationship.

Okay, next verse. The parent-child relationship, even the father-son relationship. In the Chinese culture that values filial obligation, yet full of anxiety about academic advancement, this is a particularly tension-filled area.

Colossians 3:20 (NLT) Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord.

Paul's teaching to children is "always obey your parents," which echoes the Fifth Commandment: "Honor your father and mother." For minor children being raised and still living in their parents' home, this is a precious spiritual exercise. The Heavenly Father is invisible; how does a child learn to obey Him? God places the child under the visible authority of parents, so that the child, through obeying the parents, learn the precious lesson to obey the invisible Heavenly Father.

"Honoring parents" is viewed as an important virtue in many cultures, but here Paul elevates it to a higher level, because obeying parents in everything "pleases the Lord." Of course, "everything" here is obviously under the premise of not violating God's law; otherwise, how could the Lord be pleased?

Next verse, 21. There's an important detail to notice: Paul gives positive commands to wives and children—such as "submit" and "obey." However, when addressing husbands and fathers, he uses negative commands like "do not treat harshly" and "do not aggravate." This suggests that harshness and aggravation may often be significant issues in these relationships.

Colossians 3:21 (NLT) Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

In this era where families are falling apart severely, and there are so many single-parent families, this verse spoken to fathers may have a broader application now.

What does "aggravate your children" mean? Here are a few examples that parents easily do unintentionally, especially Chinese parents:

- Shaming Comparison: "Look at so-and-so's kid, good grades and obedient. What about you?"
- Criticism without Affirmation: Always seeing what the child didn't do well, stingy with praise.
- Emotional Discipline: Venting anger from work or marital relationships onto the child.
- Never Admitting Fault, Maintaining the appearance of Authority: Even when clearly wrong, refusing to admit it.

These excessive harshness, endless belittling, unrealistic expectations, and similar behaviors have serious consequences. They strike a blow to the child's confidence, making them lose heart. It makes the child "discouraged," becoming timid, inferior, withdrawing, feeling they are never good enough, and finally simply giving up trying.

Parents are God's stewards; children are the inheritance God has entrusted to us. Authority is for guiding and building up, not for venting and controlling. Before rebuking a child, parents should first give specific affirmation. Parents need to establish clear, consistent house rules at home and enforce them with a gentle and firm attitude.

Above all, it is essential that parents help their children not just understand the Gospel but also be able to experience it firsthand. When a parent honestly admits their mistakes to their children, it shows that even Mom and Dad need the grace of Jesus.

Besides this negative command not to let children become "discouraged," in the parallel passage in Ephesians 6 and other scriptures, the Bible also mentions a positive command to parents: parents must teach well. Raising children is the parents' personal responsibility; this itself is a service to God within the household.

In modern society, parents both work and are busy, and education is becoming increasingly professionalized and utilitarian. So, we parents are very accustomed to outsourcing education, such as children's talent classes, cram schools, etc. But the cultivation of spiritual character cannot be outsourced; parents cannot outsource the responsibility of upbringing to Sunday School or the church. Because parents and the family are the primary site of spiritual formation, the starting point for shaping character.

Let me repeat today's keyword again: "Therefore." Because Christ has already done that for us, "So," we must do this. The second keyword is "Relationship." The relationship between parents and children is an expression of a heavenly relationship on earth, and God has requirements for the expression of this relationship.

While preparing the sermon, I already realized that the time spent on the previous scriptures was too long, so I will try to be brief with the third part of the scripture. But brief does not mean it is unimportant, because the third part speaks of the place where we spend the most time during our waking hours—the workplace.

In Paul's time, the "Master-Slave relationship" did not happen in a company but in a home. Because at that time, there was no such thing as a company. These three relationships—husband/wife, father/son, master/slave—all took place within the household.

For us today, the traditional master/slave dynamic within households has shifted into an employer/employee relationship.

Here I want to introduce a very famous Latin phrase: Coram Deo, which means "living before the face of God." This is a core view of life and work for Christians. Living one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and to the glory of God.

Colossians 3:22 (NLT) Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord.

Paul criticized a work attitude called "when they are watching you." (eye-service KJV) Christians should not be like this. Why? Because your real Boss is not the supervisor paying your salary, but the Lord Christ. This completely shatters the wrong concept of "dividing things into sacred-secular categories." We often think that only leading worship or teaching Sunday School in church is serving God. Wrong!

When, for the Lord's sake, you earnestly write every line of code; when, for the Lord's sake, you honestly complete a report; when, for the Lord's sake, you clean the company toilet—you are worshiping God, you are serving Jesus Christ our Lord.

For brothers and sisters who are supervisors or bosses, Colossians 4:1 posts an extremely serious warning:

Colossians 4:1 (NLT) Masters, be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven.

This statement reminds us that the authority you possess is temporarily entrusted to you by God, and in the future, you will need to give an account to Him for how you used this authority. Do you treat your subordinates "just and fair"? Do you give them the dignity, and reward them with what they deserve? The greatest testimony of a Christian leader in the workplace is not hanging a cross in the office, but demonstrating a leadership style of justice, mercy, and humility.

## Conclusion

I'm about to finish, it's the "so what" part. I know there might be a voice in someone's heart saying: "Aldo, what you said is all proper and good, but I really can't do it! My spouse is just that unreasonable, my child is just that rebellious, and my boss is a tyrant."

Well, I know. If we do not put off the old and if we do not put on the new, relying on our flesh and blood and that corrupt "old me", we indeed simply cannot do it. The power to practice this scripture must be rooted in what Colossians 3:1–3 says, that "you died to this life", and you "raised to new life with Christ."

Colossians 3:1 (NLT) Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.

Colossians 3:2 (NLT) Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.

Colossians 3:3 (NLT) For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

It is the death of our "selfishness," the death of our "face," the death of our "desire for control." Only when we have truly died, can Christ's sacrificial, gentle, and obedient life be lived out within us.

Therefore, this is not a conflict of interpersonal relationships, but a spiritual warfare. Our real enemy is not our spouse, our children, our boss, or employees, but the sinful nature within ourselves and the dark powers behind it. Therefore, the only thing we can do is pray unceasingly, rely on the Holy Spirit, and constantly return to the Gospel, admitting our weakness and inability, to draw upon Christ's power of death and resurrection.

Let us return to the plaque at the beginning—"Christ is the Head of This House." This should not just be a slogan; it must transform into our specific daily actions. Every day, off with the old and in with the new. When every family in our church does this, people around will be able to tell that, "Christ is the Head of this Church."

### Closing Prayer

Let us pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, we admit that living out Your truth at home is the most difficult lesson. We confess our shortcomings in marriage, parenting, and workplace relationships: we husbands have not loved sacrificially, wives have not submitted willingly, parents have often aggravated their children, and at work, we have often just done things for others to see.

Lord, forgive our pride and self-centeredness. We ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate us and grant us the power to "die to the old self," so that the resurrected life of Christ may be lived out in us. Lord Jesus, we invite You to truly ascend the throne as Lord in every one of our families today, to rule over every relationship we have, so that Your glory, and not our resentment, may fill our homes.

We pray in the victorious holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.