

The best you you can be

Colossians 3.18 – 4.18

I asked you a couple of weeks ago. I askeddo you feel 100 percent? Chapter 2 Paul was talking about the fullness we have in Christ. I've got another question for you today. A little bit more cryptic.

Here's the question. Are you a plum or a banana?

Are you a plum...or a banana?

The question's got to do with being the best YOU you can be. Let me explain.

You can be the best plum in the world. You can be ripe and juicy and shiny. Succulent.

But don't forget. Not everyone likes plums. So you need to understand. Even if you're the world's finest plum. Some people just don't like plums. They prefer bananas. So you have a choice.

One you can either try to become a banana or you can be the world's finest plum.

Now.... if you choose to become a banana. There's two issues to consider.

One, if you choose to become a banana, you'll only be a second rate banana. Because in fact, you are plum.

Second. Even if you could become the world's best banana.....there's people who don't like bananas.

So what are you going to do?

Are you a plum or a banana? That's the fundamental question.

In other words....What are you? And then the follow up....what are you TRYING TO BE?

Because you can spend a lot of energy trying to be something you're not.

OR..... you can just try to be the best you you can be. And I'm sure I've heard that phrase somewhere - maybe in a shampoo commercial I'm not sure.

The illustration comes from a LIFE COACH. And you know. It's actually pretty good advice. And I think the apostle Paul would say AMEN to that.

To being the best YOU you can be.

Rather than trying to be something you're not.

But he'd add this. He'd say ...if you're going to be the best you you can be...you have to be IN CHRIST.

It's only in Christ you can be the best you you can be.

Because IN CHRIST. You're being restored to the image of God.

IN CHRIST. You have the hope of heaven.

IN CHRIST. You have fullness and NEW LIFE. The old you DIED WITH CHRIST. That's what we saw last week. And now that you've been raised with Christ. It's like you're a new person.

The person God intended when he made you. And because of that you have to put off the things of the sinful nature. And you have to put on the things of the new you. The new you in Christ. And you set your minds on things above. You remember from last week.

And the wash up is.....as you continue in him. Rooted and built up in him. You're becoming the best YOU..... you can be.

But you're not doing that by throwing off your gender. Or your employment. Or your marriage. You're not being packed off to a commune, or to a monastery where you can learn

to be the new you and then get some sort of new identity like in the witness protection program.

It's the new you. In the old skin. It's the new you. The best you you can be. In the every day things of life. In the roles and responsibilities you've been given.

The old preacher Charles Spurgeon, talking about Paul's letter to the Colossians said this. He said. The letter starts in heaven. And ends in the kitchen. It's a great line.

And you can see there. We're looking at verse 18 onwards from chapter 3. And Paul's talking to wives. He's talking to husbands and kids and dads and masters and slaves. And he's saying who you are IN CHRIST. Changes who you are in the family. In the home. At work. In your every day roles.

In Christ you're not liberated from your role. Whatever that is. You're liberated from the corruption of that role. To fulfil it the way you were always meant to.

And I hope you'll see in doing so Paul's giving great dignity and great value and worth to each of these roles.

Now as we run through obviously not everyone will fit into every role here. So not every one of these will apply to you. And there's three groups he 's talking to. Wives and Husbands. Children and Fathers, slaves and masters. In that order. So lets see what he says.

First of all wives.

If you're going to be the best you you can be. Paul says you wives need to submit to your husbands. He says this is fitting in the Lord. It's appropriate.

And next verse, verse 19 husbands, here's your bit. Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Now, imagine, if you're a husband and wife if you turned up to a counseling session. And the counselor said that. If he or she looked at the wife and said. Submit to him. It's fitting. And then they turn to the husband. Take his hand. Put it on hers. And say. Love your wife, and don't be harsh.

That'll be all. My fee is \$250, thanks.

You'd have to feel a bit ripped off, wouldn't you. Now, Paul expands on that a little bit in some other letters, but that's pretty much the guts of the New Testament teaching to husbands and wives.

And it's great advice. It's great insight into how we were made. Biblically. The way we've been made....the man is the head. That's how he's been made. The wife is the helper. That's how she's been made. And if you want to get hot under the collar about that. Go look at 1 Corinthians 11. 1 Timothy 2. Ephesians 5. Genesis 1 and 2.

And if you don't think subordination's a good thing. Have a read of the gospels. Where Jesus submits himself to the father. In fact he attains salvation for the world by submission to death. And the Holy Spirit. Well he's called the helper. And he's sent by the father. Equal in value. Subordinate roles. Not a problem.

And the wash up is. Men and women are equal but different. And when you try to make them the same. You devalue both.

Imagine...ladies. You step outside and see your husbands got your best towel set. And he's using them to chock the wheels of the car so it won't roll.

It's a de-valuing isn't it. And if we're not to de-value ourselves. We have to get our roles right. Give them the dignity God gave them.

There's a great book on relationships it's going to be one of our books of the month shortly. It's called Love and Respect. It's called that. Because that's exactly what it's about. Women

here's what you need to know about him. He needs respect. He doesn't mind love. It's an ok thing take it or leave it. But at his core. If he doesn't have respect it guts him to the core.

And men. More than anything else... She needs love.

That's the basic thrust of the book. He's saying. This is how we're made.

Let me just read you the intro page. Emerson Eggerich. Says

I wrote this book out of desperation that was turned into inspiration. As a pastor, I counseled married couples and could not solve their problems. The major problem I heard from wives was, "He doesn't love me." Wives are made to love, want to love, and expect love. Many husbands fail to deliver. But as I kept studying Scripture and counseling couples, I finally saw the other half of the equation. Husbands weren't saying it much, but they were thinking, She doesn't respect me. Husbands are made to be respected, want respect, and expect respect. Many wives fail to deliver. The result is that five out of ten marriages land in divorce court (and that includes evangelical Christians).

As I wrestled with the problem, I finally saw a connection; without love from him, she reacts without respect; without respect from her, he reacts without love. Around and around it goes. I call it the Crazy Cycle- marital craziness that has thousands of couples in its grip. In these first seven chapters I will explain how we all get on the Crazy Cycle – and how we all can get off.

So there's a bit of a plug for the book.

But I suppose it's not surprising....Paul's been saying it for yonks. Husbands, love your wives. Wives submit to your husbands.

Now, it has to be said. This stuff can be totally abused. And used as a defence for domineering, controlling men. Who want to enforce verse 18 and ignore verse 19.

And if that's you. I need to take this opportunity. To say don't you dare. Call yourself a man. And think you can treat your wife as some kind of possession that you can treat how you like. And especially....don't think you can call yourself a Christian man if that's the way you live. In fact. I hear about it. Maybe we'll round a few of the boys up and we'll take you out the back and give you the right hand of fellowship. You know what I mean.

It's not on. Husbands. I'm talking to you. Love your wives.

Let me ask you husbands. If I asked your wife how you're going with that. On a scale of one to ten of the love meter?? How would she answer? How would you rate? Because we can equally fail the test at the other end of the spectrum, by simply withdrawing. And I suspect that's probably a bigger problem for us. Guys. We don't like getting served up small helpings. So let me ask you. If the love you're dishing up to your wife was a meal. How generous would it be. Would it be a super size, or would she be starving to death?

And wives. It's fitting...that he be respected. And he loves it. It builds up his ego. We're more fragile than you think. And you need to help us out.

Onto the next pair of relationships. Children and parents. I think Paul's talking to younger children here still living at home. That could be up to the age of 35, I suppose, these days. And it's a bit stronger language here. He says.

Children, OBEY your parents. It's a command. And obey them in everything, for this pleases the Lord. I haven't used that line on my kids yet but it sounds like a good one. Maybe I'll put it on the fridge.

And then it's interesting. Paul zones in on the dads. And he says. Fathers, don't embitter your children. Or they'll become discouraged.

Cathy tells me she and her sisters used this one on their dad any time he did something they didn't like. Pretty sure that went down like a lead balloon.

But maybe dads are most at fault here. We're pretty good and dishing out the commands and the discipline. Not so good on the encouragement.

The power of words is pretty amazing. Especially parents their kids look up to. My kids aren't quite old enough, but I'm still waiting 'till I can get full value out of those words my parents used on me – I'm very disappointed in you..

Words are powerful. They can cut you in half. But they can also make you ten feet tall.

I've got a friend – his name's Phil. In his fifties now. Looks back on his childhood years. Says my dad never told me, never told us kids. That he loved us. A Christian man. A faithful dad. But he either couldn't express it or didn't think he need to say those words ... Fifty years on...and Phil still feels the pain because of the words that WEREN'T SAID.

You want to be the best you you can be. Parents, dads, encourage your kids. And dads. This is for you. You've got to use words. Just for a bit of practice. Maybe we could say it together.

Well done. I love you. You're the best. There's a couple to start with.

Ok. Wives and husbands. Children and parents. Now Slaves and Masters.

And just like the other relationships – where there's some kind of subordination. Paul gives a lot of dignity here to the one submitting. How you act as slaves MATTERS to him.

Verse 22.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with SINCERITY OF HEART and reverence for the Lord.

Now, I don't know too many slaves, but there's not a huge amount of difference between slaves and employees when you think about it. Especially when you use the example Paul's just given. About people who slack off when the boss isn't around.

In Paul's day you were pretty much either a son or a slave. A daughter or a slave girl. Your options were pretty much family business, soldier, or slave. Not too many multi-national corporations paying wages.

Main difference for us is choice. Don't like the conditions. You can leave. Don't like the wages or the boss. You can choose something else. But that's a bit of luxury. Poorer countries. Technically there's not slaves any more. But there's hardly a difference. When some people are forced to work in bad conditions. For terrible pay. And you don't have a choice. There's not much difference.

And depending on your boss, you might see no difference at all between slavery and employment. But Paul says. Regardless of your boss. Regardless of your master if you're a slave. Work as if you're doing it for Jesus. With SINCERITY OF HEART. Because if you're in Christ. You'll be the best employee you can be. Because you'll have the right attitude.

We'll go with an example. Lets say you're working for a multi-national corporation.

Let's say we'll pick a company at random. Let's say you're working for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia who's just announced a 4 billion dollars profit last financial year.

Despite that fact. Despite 4 billion in profit, even in the middle of the world's worst financial crisis in 100 years.

Being a person who's in Christ means even if you're working for THEM.....you'll be a good employee. Mean's you'll be an asset. Means you'll be valuable to them. You'll be reliable because you're sincere. Verse 23 he says

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

The best you you can be, is a worker with integrity.

I have a brother in law. His name is Matt.

He used to do a lot of leading on camps in our church.

And one day one of the guys who'd also been on a couple of camps, who owned a business in mortgage broking offered Matt a job.

He said hey Matt, how'd you like to come and work for me.

In fact more than that. He said. If you're interested. I'd like to train you to be a manager.

And Matt was a bit surprised. He said. I don't know anything about finance.

And this guy said. I know that. He said doesn't matter. He said. I can teach you finance.

But you've already got what I need. Which can't be taught. And that's integrity.

He said I've seen the way you operate. And that's the kind of employee I want.

So be a person of integrity. Paul says. Work like you're serving Christ.

Little warning. That doesn't mean work yourself to death. I don't think that means – it's the day before Christmas and everyone else is having a Christmas party. Including your boss. And you say – not me I'm a Christian. I have to keep working. Please don't do that – you'll give us a bad wrap. Just ask yourself this question. Are you giving value? If it was your company.

Here's a good question. Would you employ you? And then ask yourself this. I think this is slightly harder question. Are you working with all your heart? Are you working to please the boss, or Jesus. Because you know you'll receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward?

There's great dignity in being a worker.

And masters. Employees. At every level. Are you treating the people you're responsible for fairly and rightly?

Or are you exploiting them? And again. It's an attitude question first and foremost.

I never know what to think when there's a union dispute like at the Patricks wharves. Because they're both trying to exploit the other. On one hand. How many bosses don't pay the right wage rates, expect overtime for nothing. Exploit their workers.

But on the other hand. How many employees take sicky after sicky and rort the system. Arrive late, leave early, do the bare minimum. Slack off.

It works both ways.

Paul says you masters don't forget you've got a master too. So be fair.

The best you you can be. Is the you that's IN CHRIST...in those every day roles in life. In the kitchen. At home. At the office.

Paul says don't worry about those guys who're maybe inferring that you're incomplete because they went to three church services last Sunday. Or who've been to bible college. Or who've fasted for five weeks.

Be the person He made you to be. And now you're in Christ. Continuing in that's not so bad.