

How the Gospel Changes Relationships

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Good morning. My name is Chris. I'm one of the pastors here at Watermark. It's just really exciting to be here with you. I have a white shirt because it's the World Cup and England are going to be playing soon. So I will probably not wear it afterwards because I'll be too embarrassed. But at least before the World Cup, I can wear it with pride.

Let me pray for us before we start. Father, just thank you. Thank you that your word is living and active and powerful. Thank you that you want to speak to us. I pray, Lord, that you would take my feeble words and you would fill them with your power and your spirit so that you would just touch our hearts. Would we have hearts that want to hear from you, that don't just want to listen and turn away, but want to hear what you say and do what you call us to? I pray this in your name. Amen. Just lower this slightly. Great. One of the amazing things about being a pastor in the church is I get to do premarital counseling with some couples who are just so excited about spending the rest of their lives together. And then I get to spend time with couples who've been married for a number of years and they're sometimes saying, I don't know quite why I ever married this person. And then I get times to spend with people who are just ecstatic about they've just landed their dream job. They're leaving one job. They're just coming to their new job. And then I see them a few months later and they're six months in and they're like, I wish I'd never changed from my previous job. And it doesn't matter where you are in life. Work, family, relationships matter to us. They're significant. But even in the best of these things, the best relationships, there's always something that's missing. There's something that we were made for, which is more than what these things offer us. And today we're continuing in our series in Colossians and we're going to see that Paul says, don't look to your marriage or to family or to work to be what only Christ can be for you. Okay, that's where we're going. Don't look to these things to be anything that only Christ can be for you. And so what we've looked at so far, and I hope you have your passage open with you because we'll just kind of go through a little bit together. We've looked in Colossians and Paul has said, when you become a Christian, you don't just get a kind of get out of jail free card. It's you actually gain Christ. You become united like in a marriage relationship with God, the creator of the universe himself. And Jesus' story of his death and resurrection becomes your story. So your old life where you used to live for yourself, a slave to your own desires, like a prisoner of war, as Kevin preached a couple of weeks ago, that's died when Christ died. And you now have, when Jesus was raised from the dead, you have a new life. Your life is hidden in him and you're liberated to live for him. And so we saw last week how this new identity in Jesus, it changes everything, even within the church. We saw outside people are valued according to their race, socioeconomic status, if they've double eyelids or drive a Maserati. But inside the church, your value comes from your identity as a child of God, regardless of any of those other things. That's why Paul says, there's no Greek, Jew, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free. In Christ, you now have value. But today, what Paul is going to say is what you truly believe is not just seen on Sunday, where we kind of sing nice songs together and we say, yeah, Jesus, we love you. But then if you want to see how the gospel is working in your life, go through the keyhole into your home. Go into the workplace because the gospel is not just for Sunday. The gospel is to come not just into your living room, it's to come into your kitchen, into your bedroom, into your office. The gospel is to shape everything. Okay. So that's what we're going to look at today. And I want to say just a couple of things before we dive into this passage, because there's a few things in this passage which we as 21st century people have got to get through to really understand what Paul is saying. So this part of the passage that we're looking at is what's called a household code. And that was very common in those days. It's a form of writing where people often used to say, okay, this is how you guys should deal with relationships in marriage, family, and work. And actually, all of these things in their culture would

take place in the home. Slightly different for us, but it would all be in the home. So writers came up with things that they thought would keep order for how to make sure things didn't get out of control. And so you have things which in our culture we struggle with. You have things like submission of wives. You've got slavery. And we look at these kind of things and we go, ooh, that's a bit backward and repressive. But the thing is, when Paul was writing, people would have heard what Paul was writing and said, oh, what you're writing is a little bit offensive, but not for the reasons that we think it's offensive, for other things. So we mentioned last week, Josephus, a Jewish historian, he says, the woman, says the law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive. That's what first century people around thought.

[6:16] Another guy called Plutarch in the first century, he said, a virtuous woman ought to be most visible in her husband's company and to stay in the house and hide herself when he's away.

That's what people were teaching at those times. In other words, for them, submission meant a woman is inferior, her identity and value only comes from her husband. And actually, when most of us hear that, that's often historically what people have meant by submission. And then with slaves, Aristotle, who really influenced first century, he said a slave is a living tool and some people are just born to be slaves. It's the same idea. Your worth and your value is found in your position in society. You're inferior. And Paul, as we've said, has said, no, no, no, no, no. That is not where your value is found. Your value is found in Christ. You know, and from what I've just shared before about what he says, there's no slave or free. In Galatians 3, 28, he also says in Jesus, there's no male or female. There's no inferiority or superiority. In fact, if in the church you start doing that, you've missed what Christ is all about. No one has any right to look down on anyone else. And in the first century culture, that would have been radical. But then you've got to ask, well, why does Paul still call wives to submit and slaves still to obey? Is he affirming these institutions?

So let's just start with slavery. Because many people think, how can the Bible justify slavery? And they look at these kind of passages. And what we've got to understand is, Paul is speaking to people in this church who are slaves, many of them. And do you know how you became a slave? Many of the times, you were actually kidnapped by pirates, or you were a prisoner of war, or your family had been so poor that they'd had to sell you into slavery. And some slaves were actually highly educated. Some even attained some top jobs. Some even owned their own slaves. But the point was this, that if you were a slave, if you started a revolution to kind of rise up against slavery, slavery, you would almost certainly, and we know from the first century people tried to do it, you would be killed, or you'd be thrown out on the street with no support.

Basically, Paul, when he's writing to slaves, he's not trying to overturn the institution of slavery, because what he's trying to do, he's facing the reality of where these Christians were. And he's saying, the gospel is to reshape you where you are.

[9:03] Now, in 1 Corinthians 7, he actually says, if you can get free, get free. But if you can't, many of you are so trapped in these situations, here's how the gospel is going to reshape you.

So that's the context of the slavery, context of marriage and family. And here is a biblical context, where in verse 9 and 10, which we didn't read today, Paul talks about us being renewed in the image of our creator.

And the Bible story has this narrative where it says, God has set up certain institutions of government and of marriage and of parenting, and there is to be order in those.

Just as it reflects order within the way that God himself works. Because God is both equal and a Trinitarian God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but there's diversity of roles.

And so, what you see is, when you see Jesus, because as Christians, Jesus shapes who we're being made into. He is both equal to the Father, but when he goes into the Garden of Gethsemane, do you know what he says?

[10:12] He says, it's not my will, but yours be done. He submits to his Father, though he's equal to him. He's not repressed, he's not inferior, but he's offering a gift of love to honor his Father.

And in Ephesians 5, Paul then says, just as Jesus submits to his Father, he also leads the church by laying down his life sacrificially for her, to love her.

And Paul says, in marriage, God has set up the same way to reflect how Jesus and the Trinity work together. So, the husband is called to lead, as Jesus does, laying down his life for her, serving her for her good, not for his interest.

Wives are called to submit, not as repressed or inferior, but as a voluntary gift of love to your husband. The wife is called to put his will before hers, the husband is called to put her interest

before his.

Because that's what images, Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit working together. So, we've got to kind of get through some of that. That's what Paul's talking about.

[11:22] But let's kind of come and get into the text a little bit more. Because it doesn't matter if you're single, or if you're married, if you're a parent, or if you're a worker in the marketplace, there's principles here that Paul's going to say they apply to every single one of you, wherever you're up to.

But we're going to spend more time focusing on marriage and on parenting with just a short time at the end on work. Okay? You with us so far? Good.

Oscar is. Okay. So, G.K. Chesterton, he's a fun guy, he once said, marriage is an adventure like going to war.

And he's right. Marriage is war. Family is war. The workplace is war.

But the enemy is not supposed to be the other person. Did you get that? You see, what often happens is all of these things do become war. But the way that we work is we want control.

[12:29] We want our desires to be met. We want our way. And when we don't get it, we go into verbal or mental, like passive-aggressive kind of war with each other.

But Paul is going to say with all of these relationships, in these areas, these are arenas where God supplies them not primarily to make yourself happy, to get what you want and be fulfilled in a self-centered way.

It's provide you with opportunities to put to death the areas of your life where you're still living for yourself. Did you get that? And it's not just to provide you with opportunities to put yourself to death. It's also to provide you with opportunities, like he's talked about in the passage, to grow in compassion, to grow in patience, to grow in meekness, to grow in humility and forgiveness in every area of your life.

That's what your work is about. That's what your family is about. That's what your marriage is about. So here's how the gospel shapes us in these things.

[13:33] The gospel shapes us because it turns us from ourself to others. Verse 18. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them. Paul is saying, since you've died with Christ, you're no longer a prisoner to yourself. Your orientation of your marriage is going to shift from you to the other person.

So the wife, as I've said, puts his will before hers. Husband puts her interest before his and they're flourishing in together in a lifelong process of growing more and more like Jesus, glorifying him in your relationship.

So for the husband, it looks like this. Love your wives. Do you know, love is not a passive action. It's not active. Active love, because love is always active, is not sitting on the sofa just thinking about work.

Active love is not meditating on all the things that are wrong on your spouse. Active love is initiating, thinking of, and proactively doing what will enable the other person to flourish.

[14:47] And to do that, you have to get to know them. Right? You have to spend time with them. You have to listen to them. Because I've read books which tell me how to love my wife and they say things like take her out for meals and buy her flowers.

But my wife is not that into just always going out for meals. She likes to eat at home. And actually, she's not really into flowers either. So, to lovingly lead her as God calls me to, I've got to spend time getting to know her.

So that's why you can't just take a principle from whatever anyone says and just slap it on your own marriage. You've got to know each other. It's relationship. relationship. But, you know in Genesis, God calls Adam to be the leader in the relationship and he gives a command to Adam.

He says, don't eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil or you'll die. Okay? It's pretty clear. Now, who eats from the tree? First.

Eve does. What was Adam doing? Do you know what it says? It says he was right there with her. You think, I think if he'd had an iPhone, he would have been on his iPhone just watching YouTube videos.

[16:00] Watching to see, okay, what's going to happen to her? God said, we're going to die if we eat this, but let's see. Because if she doesn't eat, then maybe I'll have some afterwards.

But, is Adam taking leadership? Is he loving his wife? No, because you know what happens? God comes straight to him afterwards and says to him, okay, Adam, why did you eat from the tree? And he goes, it was her, not me. And you see, when God has called Adam to take leadership, he's not doing that because he's not loving his wife.

He's only being passive and thinking of himself. And actually, I was talking with my wife this week and just convicted I'm so much more like Adam sometimes in my life. But, you know, Pastor John Piper, he says something like, he says something that actually has convicted me.

He says, do you want to know who's leading out of love in your marriage? He says this, who says let's more? Who says let's more? Let's go out to eat tonight.

[17 : 04] Let's get our finances in order. Let's get to CG together. Let's pray together. Let's work on our marriage together. And it's not just, let's watch football every night because that's what I want to do.

Right? And he says, as a generalization and there's exceptions, but if the wife is saying let's far more than the guy, that's both a burden on the wife and it's a problem with the guy because he's not doing what God has called him to do, which is to lay down his life and lead her, flourishing her.

So guys, how are we doing? How are we doing with leading and flourishing our wives so that they spiritually grow in Christ so that our marriage is wanting to be centered on him?

Are you saying let's? And notice, he doesn't say love your wives when they're giving you sex.

He doesn't say love your wives when they're prioritizing you above their kids. He doesn't say love your wives when you feel respected by them. He says, love your wives and don't be harsh with them.

[18 : 14] Do you know what that means? That means literally don't be embittered by them. You see, precisely when you feel they're not meeting your needs for and desires for sex and respect and time, that's precisely the time where God has called you to still keep loving.

It's tough. You know, there's a book called His Needs, Her Needs. Has anyone read that? It's a good book. I recommend it. And what it says is men have needs and women have needs and it's like a love tank.

You know, you kind of fill each other up and you, you know, men have needs for sex and respect and women have needs for like to be listened to and to be cherished and for conversation. So, wives, give him what he needs.

Men, give them what your wife needs and it will be great. And there's a lot of wisdom in it. There's just one problem. If you look back in verse 13, Paul tells us, everyone, but in the context of marriage, he's applying it here, bear with one another in love.

Forgive each other. If you have a complaint, and this includes your spouse, if you're having a complaint, forgive and walk with each other in this. Why does he say this?

[19 : 41] He says it, when you get married, who do you marry? And if you're not single, if you're single, listen carefully. Who do you marry? You marry a sinner.

Right? Every time. And who did they marry? They married a sinner too, and that's you. Now, through sin or through circumstances, there will be times where your spouse will not fill your love tank, will not meet all your needs.

And as guys, and actually in both senses, for men and women, we can end up looking elsewhere into work, into other women, into pornography, even if it's just in your mind, and we get resentful and bitter because we're not getting what we want, and we're not getting what we want at that moment because we've failed also to see that Jesus says, you've died, and your life is hidden with Christ.

He's your life, not your wife. Your wife cannot justify you, only Jesus can. Your wife cannot fulfill you, only Jesus can. That can free you if you realize that in a relationship, each other is at some point or other going to disappoint you, and the only place for your salvation is not in each other, it's in Jesus.

That frees you to be thankful. That frees you to be patient, and it frees you to say, let's talk about this, but without demands, without accusations, but with patience, compassion, and gentleness.

[21 : 16] husbands, love your wives. I've spent more time on that, but that is every single guy here. Whether you're married or not, God has called you to be active in love.

How are we doing? But wives, submit to your husbands. Notice he says, not to all men, just to your husband.

He doesn't say, husbands, make your wives submit. He doesn't say that. He says, submit in the Lord. In other words, you're submitting with Jesus as your highest authority. Your husband is not your highest authority. Jesus is. So you submit only in matters of preference, not in matters of sin. And submission doesn't mean wives be a doormat. It doesn't mean be a punch bag. It doesn't mean give up your own opinions. It doesn't mean give up the ways to influence. It's not about who earns more money. It's not about who washes the dishes. It's none of those things.

[22 : 18] Because God wants strong and godly women who know and think and influence for the cause of Christ. Jesus and Paul's ministry is filled with women who are playing key roles advancing the gospel in a male-dominated society.

But here's what submission is. Again, I'm using John Piper. Submission is the defined calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and so help to carry it through according to her gifts.

It's to honor and affirm her husband's leadership. It's a voluntary gift of love you give to your husband. It's being willing to yield to him the casting vote when after discussion you still can't agree. It's making space for him to lead so he can flourish in that. It's making space to honor and affirm his leadership. So how do you do that?

How do you do that well so there's a healthiness? Well, here's how you don't do it. Okay? You don't affirm someone's leadership when you focus on all the things he doesn't do rather than all the thinking of all the things he does do.

[23 : 31] Okay? You know, he agreed to go shopping for you. And he comes back having forgotten seven of the ten items you asked him and having bought a drone on the way for himself.

Now, women who are not affirming their husband's leadership say things like, you never remember things I want. You always think of yourself.

Now, that may be 90% true. But, it doesn't work in a relationship. But those who are looking to affirm their husband's leadership, do you know what they do?

They say they point out what he's doing well. So they build this culture of gospel affirmation. They say, thank you for serving me by shopping for our family. I really appreciate you taking the time to do that.

Is there any way I can help you remember the other items next time? And you know what? When you try that, you see what happens. When my wife does that to me, I kind of go, I was quite selfish, wasn't I?

[24 : 37] It doesn't work when you're actually so focused on trying to undermine whether Christ calls us to affirm and honor. That's what it means, submit leadership. And you know, how do we do that?

Because he says, we died with Christ we're putting to death anger. We're putting on compassion, putting on patience, putting on meekness.

That's a strength that is gentle. And the only way that husbands can love, the only way that wives can submit is if you realize that Christ is your life, not your spouse.

Only Christ is your life, not your spouse. That's the first thing. The gospel changes us. And if you're dating or single, by the way, don't settle for someone who is not seeking to lead you towards Christ if you're a woman.

And if you're a guy, don't settle for someone who is not wanting you to lead them towards Christ because your marriage will not picture what Christ has called you to be.

[25 : 46] God is not so that's from self to others. That's what the gospel does. The second thing the gospel does, it takes us from provocation to hopeful confidence.

And again, I'm going to spend less time on the next two points just in case you were kind of wondering. Children, obey your parents for this pleases the Lord.

Fathers, don't provoke your children lest they be discouraged. Notice Paul, he values children by speaking to them. That was unusual. That didn't happen in their culture.

And he speaks to them as those who can know and please Jesus. As those who can have a relationship with Jesus even when they're young. But I'm going to focus on the parents here.

And notice that in this first part of the verse he focuses and mentions both parents, mothers and fathers. But then in the second he says to fathers specifically because they were called to be the spiritual heads of the household.

[26 : 52] And he says don't provoke your children. And that literally provoke means to stir up, to irritate them lest they be discouraged. And you can see from what he calls the children to be to obey parents so that it pleases God that actually he's saying don't act in such a way that they're going to be irritated to the point of losing courage and motivation to please Christ and to obey you.

Okay? Don't act in a way that does that. Now you cannot make your children love Jesus but you can provide a gospel soil for them to experience the goodness and love of Jesus through your parenting.

So I want to take this particular angle here today. There's so many things we can say. Simon has said most of the things already. But I want to just talk about it's alright Simon can preach next week. But I want to talk about a couple of things. What is the opposite of discouragement? What's the opposite? it's being filled with confidence and hope.

Gospel parenting builds a household filled with confidence and hope. And he's saying don't undermine that by bringing discouragement.

[28 : 15] Now here's the difference between secular thinking and Christian thinking. Secular thinking the world says build your child's self-confidence. confidence. The gospel says build your child's God confidence.

The world says build your child's hope in their school achievements in their career in their ability to have a secure financial future. The gospel says build your hope your child's hope in Jesus in whom your life is hidden.

Because jobs will come jobs will go but only in Christ will they have confidence regardless of any circumstance. It's the greatest thing you can give your children.

And so how can we provoke our children to lose or not have that kind of confidence? Well I want to just give you one specifically.

It's when your own confidence and hope is in your performance it's in other things other than Jesus. It's in when you as parents it's in things other than Jesus.

[29 : 18] You know you can give your children moral principles. Christian moral principles. You can discipline them with the law to make them good people on the outside but if you yourself are not delighting in the grace and the love and the forgiveness of Jesus it will provoke and discourage them.

You know when I was when I was at school we had a Christian assembly. I hated Christian assembly. There was in my school there were two Christians out of 1500 people and so but we had to do we had Christian moral teaching the teachers would give us Christian moral teaching and I knew that none of the teachers believed it and then we were made to sing these hymns and I knew none of the teachers really delighted in what they were singing.

it was words to them and even now I just despise it it made me just irritated and angry because the hypocrisy that I saw and actually if I hadn't had a great example from my parents of the gospel I would have despised Christianity.

John Piper again says this some parents fail to be happy and hopeful and confident in God.

Mothers and fathers what you are in relation to God is far more important than any particular parenting technique you try and employ.

Will your children hope in God if you hope in money? Will your children be happy in God if they see that your phone or your work is a happier experience for you than worship?

[31 : 05] Will your children be confident in God if your whole demeanor communicates the desire to be seen as self confident? God this is the challenge of the gospel for all of us.

You know you can come to church and then you get that dreaded call from kids ministry that your kids are the one who are causing all the trouble. What goes through your minds?

Are we confident in the love of Jesus to say okay this is not about me what an amazing teachable moment to help my child understand the gospel better? Or are we so worried about what everyone else is going to think that we come down harder on our kids than we normally would?

Our kids know your relationship with God is the most important gift you will ever give to your children. So are you investing in that gift? Are you investing in that gift?

Paul Tripp says this, I have never seen a particular sin, weakness, or fear in my child that I couldn't identify or see its effects in my own heart.

[32 : 18] No parent gives mercy better than one who is convinced that he desperately needs it himself. You see there's so much pressure, there's so much expectation in Hong Kong on parents,

on kids, but if you as a parent know that your confidence rests not in how great you've been as a parent, not in whether you've done everything correctly, but in the grace and mercy, the compassion, the patience, the kindness that Paul talks about that is all characteristic of God's love for us.

Then when we discipline, we discipline out of firmness but out of patience and grace, and your kids will experience a goodness of God, not just moral teaching but delighting in who Jesus is.

The gospel changes you from self to others. The gospel changes you from provoking to hopeful confidence for yourself and for your kids. Last thing, and this is going to be short, and this actually, all of these things apply in every relationship in different ways.

And this one, the last thing I'm going to say is the gospel changes us from present reward to worship of Christ. And Paul applies this to work, and we'll spend more time looking at work and things later on, but I just want to talk about two things.

Paul goes on to say, slaves, obey your earthly masters, not out of eye service, not just when they're looking, not just when they're there in front of you, and then when they're not there, you go on Facebook, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

[34 : 07] And then he says, you know, knowing that from the Lord, you're going to receive the inheritance as a reward. Throughout every relationship, where is your reward from?

Who is your master? If you think you're stuck in a work situation, a relationship, if you think you're stuck struggling with your boss, the slave had no choice as to which workplace they were going to be in.

He was stuck. The only choice he had or she had was this. I can do what I'm going to do out of just fear of my boss or out of worship to Jesus.

I can do what he says just when his eye is on me, and then do my work holiday planning when he's not there. Or I can see that my boss is always watching me, and my heart is that I'm not just working for an earthly master, I have a heavenly master, and I want to please him more than anyone else.

And this is hard, because the prize we're often looking for in our lives is this. I want a fully fulfilling, satisfying, meaningful job where my boss and my colleagues appreciate me and feel like I'm doing something purposeful in life.

[35 : 28] Isn't that what we want from our work? Actually, work is made to be fulfilling and satisfying. But just as in marriage and in family, it doesn't always satisfy us the way it should.

I don't think many slaves had any of those things. But in the gospel, Paul says, your workplace, whether it's fulfilling or not, whether you're appreciated or not, if you've died and Jesus has given you a new life and is your new boss, you have a new reward and your purpose is to please him. Tim Keller, I'm going to finish with this, tells the story of Chariots of Fire, where two runners, Harold Abrahams and Eric Little, were running in the 1924 Olympics.

Abrahams was obsessed with winning. He loved the sport and before his final race, he says this, he says, and now in one hour's time, I will be out there again, I will raise my eyes, I will look down that corridor four feet wide with ten lonely seconds to justify my whole existence.

But will I? But will I? Little loved running, but he did it to worship and please God. And he says, I believe that God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast.

[36 : 55] And when I run, I feel his pleasure. Abrahams thought his ultimate reward was in the gold medal. That medal was his life. And so he lived constantly fearful that he might miss out, that if he couldn't get everything he wanted in his work, in his time, then he might not have life.

Little wanted to win equally, but he knew Jesus had already died to justify him. His life was hidden now in Christ. A new identity, he had nothing to prove. Jesus' pleasure was his reward.

So he could go out and run hard and run well, but afterwards he could rest secure knowing whether he won or not, knowing whether your family is going well or not, knowing whether your marriage is going well or not.

But when Christ is your reward, you look to him as your life. You look to him as your hope. You look to him as your confidence. You look to him as the one who's going to satisfy you in a way that no matter how good your marriage, your parenting, your family, your work life is, whatever any of those things, Jesus is everything you need.

So preach it to yourself. Preach it to each other. Preach it to your CG. Every day we need help to remember my hope is not found in myself.

[38 : 24] My hope is not found in getting what I need. My hope, my confidence, my life is in Jesus alone. Let me pray. Maybe you just want to stop and just think at the moment.

Am I living with my eyes set on that prize of the pleasure of Christ?

Am I living, turning with the responsibility that God has given me, whether it's your husband or wife, whether it's your single, whether it's you are a parent or not, whether it's you're a child of your father and mother, whether it's you're an employee or an employer?

where is my life? Because you died, I died, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

I pray, Father, this week you would help us to see you. I pray this week you'd help us to see with confidence that you are with us, that you challenge us, that you're going to move us forward.

[39 : 50] Lord, your grace and your compassion and your mercy is what we need every single day. I pray that you would open our eyes to see our need of you.

Don't let us be satisfied with just living for ourselves, because we've died, and our lives are in you.

Thank you, Jesus. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Yes. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.