
Colossians 3:18-4:1 *Running the Christian Home!*

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Wives, be tender and kind to your husbands and most of all respect them. Husbands, earn your wife's respect with unconditional love for her as this is a reflection of what Christ has done for you. Wives and husbands, love each other and do not mistreat each other, as Christ has treated you beyond what you deserve or need. Children, you too must participate in the love of a home by obeying your parents and respecting them, for your obedience is pleasing to our Lord. This will also help you live well and right and not be discouraged or lose hope. Servants and workers, you too must cheerfully work hard, be obedient, and willingly respect your employers both when they are there and when they are not there. The family, as employers, must never mistreat servants and workers. These actions show respect for our Lord because when we work for others, we also are working for Christ. What we put into our work will be paid back to us just as when we mistreat or manipulate, those actions will come back to us too. God has no favorites and will not allow us to get away with evil and wrongdoing. Those who employ subjugated servants must treat them with respect, pay them an honorable wage, and provide for them in abundance beyond what is due, for this is what our Lord does for us. We all have but one Master and that is Jesus Christ. He is LORD!

Contexts and Background:

This passage is sort of a "household code," directing how one should run the home. Paul begins with the traditional Roman high ethical rules (for that time and culture) subscribed by Aristotle, and then inserts more responsibility and love into the mix. Whereas the Roman home was held with an iron hand with a whip held out to the wife, children, and servants, in contrast, Paul switches it for a kind hand outstretched with love. This comes from a crescendo of applications and putting the previous parts of his letter into practice by running the home with love. Anger, pride, and malice that create our arguments, residing from our behaviors and escalation of arrogance, criticism, defensiveness, and withdrawing, are put off. It is about placing Christ first and above all, and allowing His work in you to come through you in your family as well. A family is a microcosm of the Church all united in Christ, with gifts and responsibilities united not only in blood and bond, but in a greater connection of who we are in Christ! How we are in our relationships is the power indicator of how we are in our relationship with Christ. Family is not about power and control, or about fears and usurping authority or rebelling from it. It is about His love in each of the members, all in unison. This does not mean we do not have our ups and downs and problems, but we can create an atmosphere of trust and love as well as encouragement and support (Eph. 5:22-6:9)!

A real, effective Christian family will have Love at its core. Love is the spiritual fruit that is built from real, godly character and commitment. It is the fiber of our moral center that stretches throughout our being, embracing and holding together our relationships when it is sealed as a choice and commitment, not just a feeling. Love will synergistically combine with the other characters of our Lord that flow from the Fruit of the Spirit creating a hospitable and content home (Gal. 5:22-23). This fruit will promote our ability to relate to all and to grow in all of our relationships to better others as well as ourselves.

In the ancient world, slaves were treated as property and had little to no rights. There were many slave uprisings, but the only outcome was the killing of the slaves and matters made worse for future slaves. Here, Paul is addressing the morality of the treatment of them, not the morality of having them. The Bible declares that there is equity of all peoples and we are all equal in God's sight. Paul wanted to fix the problem, but he could not. So, he called slaves and the slave owners and everyone else to a higher standard so this heinous situation could be livable until slavery was abolished. Paul is also reinforcing what he stated in his letter to Philemon that may also have been sent alongside this letter to Colossae.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Wives.* Wives are asked to submit, as in give respect to their husbands. The wife is in submission as a response to the husband's love for her and his providing, as well as his having her best interest and care at heart.
- *Submit.* This translates from a military term (Greek: *hupotasso*), which means "to place under" or "to subordinate" as a line relationship. This is like when and how we respond to Christ with love and service because of His free gift of grace. We do not earn salvation for service; rather, service is a fruit of our gratitude. In the same way, submission is not to be forced, but offered freely in response to love. It is something we replicate, as in responding in kindness so our response to each other is fueling the other's response, and so forth. In this way, we escalate love and kindness instead of repression and dysfunction.
- *Fitting/fit.* Meaning this is how we reach out to one another and to God. It is even a duty, not because of weakness or inferiority, or that one is better than the other. Rather, God has placed, in the order of creation, the husband as head of the home, just as Christ is the head of the Church. They have different roles, yet each one is equal in the sight of God! Thus, the husband loves and respects his wife and earns her devotion and the result is the continual, mutual respect that builds an effective, strong marriage relationship (Eph. 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1).
- *Husbands.* Husbands are asked to love their wives. In ancient times, marriage contracts would advocate the husband to make his wife submit with absolute obedience. Paul's asserting to his churches and readers to love, and because of love to submit, was very radical. To Paul, love was a duty. It was even considered weak by the *macho* mindsets of the times as well as with many people today. But, this is not weak; it is building the strength of a relationship and the bond of a family by creating a mutual partnership (Amos 3:3; 1 Corinthians 7:3-4; 13)!
- *Love.* The verb for love (Greek: *agapete*) designates a continuous routine of action all of the time, not just when we feel like it. Love is "symbiotic" as in mutually loving toward each other to build and improve each one's relationship. Here a man loves a woman; she then submits because of his love. This submission is a love in itself that becomes as "*one flesh*." Literally it means our souls are tied together. This becomes a union from the Greek syntax, a union that should not be broken. So, our union with our spouse is meant to be a permanent as well as an intimate bond (Eph. 2:4-7; 5:21-32).
- *Harsh/bitter.* Meaning to be irritated and irritating in return. This is done to manipulate and scheme to get our way over His Way. A husband is not to lead by being harsh, like a shepherd who is harsh. The sheep will refuse to go with him, and perhaps will even die. Rather, he leads and guides them in the right direction with gentleness; then the sheep (and wife) will follow him. The sheep do this out of a need to be protected, to be led to food and water that they cannot find on their own. Women also have the need to feel protected and cherished. Humans are to lead other humans to the precepts of His Word and character (James 3:11-14).
- *Children.* Jewish and Roman children were expected to submit and obey by obligation. Paul says to do it by desire and then one will have a more joyful and contented life (Deut. 21:18-21).
- *Obey.* Meaning a call to have respect for authority and to care for and keep careful watch over the people as shepherds, because God will hold us to account. Another call to submit to those in authority and to value and respect them, enjoy orderliness, and learn from them. In contrast, a person with a lack of faith will not respect others because the emptiness where faith is supposed to be is filled with pride and even self-destruction, worry, and stress that lead a person no where good. This does not mean we submit to dictatorial or dysfunctional family members or any form of bad leadership (Isa. 21:8; Jer, 23:4; Ezek. 3:17; 33:6; 35:7; Hab. 2:1; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 3 John 9-10).

- *Embitter/provoke/exasperate/irritate...discouraged/disheartened/lose heart.* Jewish and Roman fathers and teachers would beat their children to teach them to be tough. Here, the Bible advocates the nurturing approach to child raising that is far more effectual and successful (Rom. 10:19).
- *Slaves/Servants.* This referred to household slaves or hired workers similar to rich people in the nineteenth century and some places today who have household servants. They were much like the butlers and maids, except then, they were usually owned by another person. Many of these slaves were lazy and had bad attitudes which made their situation worse. Some could have saved their money and bought their freedom, but most did not as their lifestyle was better than it would be if they were on their own. However, even the best-treated servants were subjugated to extreme prejudice. Others were in a hopeless situation. They were being encouraged to obey and allow their virtue to win others over. The stoic philosophers also taught this. The flipside is slaves and servants were to be treated with respect and dignity, never mistreated, and as spiritually equal before God (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:11; 4:1). Paul and the Bible are neither condemning nor condoning slavery, just stating it as a matter of fact. Paul urges them to learn to live with it and reform it by good character and the Gospel (Deut 24:1-4; Matt. 19:8; Eph. 6:5; Philemon). Slaves were also encouraged to seek their freedom through legal means (1 Cor. 7:21-24; Philemon; 1 Peter 2: 18-25). (I firmly believe if we had done that in the U.S., we would not have had our heinous civil war and the ongoing racial bigotry that we have in the U.S. I write this as a man who is descended from African and European ancestry!)
- *In reverence for the Lord.* The parallel passage in Ephesians states that Christ loved the church *not because it was holy, but in order to make it holy!* Thus, we are not only called to find the person who is best for us, but to work at keeping that relationship within the parameters of love, submission, and commitment. Even if you made the wrong choice through impatience, wrong thinking, lust, and/or sin, you still have the call and opportunity to make it right, to make it work with the mate you have! Commit to memory that something special that got you together in the first place, that can be rekindled into a roaring fire. This glorifies our Lord (Eph. 5:22-6:9).
- *Whatever you do/heartily.* Meaning to work from your heart using the best of your abilities to bring out the best in others. We glorify God when we endure with our faith and character—no matter what we might face or experience. The chief purpose for Christians, above all else, is to glorify God (Luke 22:42; John 17:22; Eph. 4:1-16). Christ is our great example for respect and endurance; He endured and suffered for you, He took your place in God's wrath, and as a sinless, innocent person, went to the cross for us all. We then follow in His steps—not for our salvation, as it has already been given to the Christian—but to show another picture to those who are watching us. We exemplify Him by being a good example! Why? He has healed and saved us, so we need to trust Him out of our gratitude, and allow Him to be our Shepherd, Guardian, and Lord over all.
- *Work.* What we do for a living. Our work is not to define us, regardless of what our society may imply. What we have in Christ is so much more! Even though this may be the first question we ask someone new to us, or that is asked of us, our work is what we do, not who we are! Work is not our identity or our worth! Commit to build Christian values and principles that lead to quality and beneficial relationships in your work habit. Anxiety and stress are often matters of outlook in families and at work (Eccl. 2:4; 4:7-8).
- *Working for the Lord/as for the Lord, not for men.* This means that to be conscious of God is an act of humility and submission; we should focus on our duty and respect authority because it is for God. This is about being a good worker as our work reflects God (1 Cor. 7:20-22; Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25; 1Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10).
- *Inheritance/reward.* Meaning we will be paid in full—in abundance. We receive our heavenly reward as a recompense for all that we have done and endured for Christ and His children and the opportunity He gave us. This is what we look forward to and what can also motivate us in the here and now (1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 22:12).

- *Masters.* This refers to being a guardian and protector—like a sentinel. This was the husband or a hired worker who protected an estate or farm, and served its owners. The point is to treat people as you want to be treated, because your situation can easily change and you could be the slave and your slave could be your master, which could happen through wars and uprisings. Our Master and Overseer is Christ (John 10:1-18)!
- *Right and fair/equal.* Referring to equality and fairness being impartial to one's status, wealth, heritage, and ethnicity and treating others as you want to be treated (Philemon 16).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

The theme of this passage is *submission*, a far cry from the American ideals of personal freedom, liberation, and choice. However, consider this; submission is not the tyrannical concept most of us harbor in our minds. Rather, it is freedom! It is a form of mutual respect. It allows us to be free, and to have the best flowing in and out of us. It is a safe harbor of smooth waters keeping us protected from the storms of wrong actions. It frees us from bad thinking that leads to bad choices which, in turn, leads to a life of misery and trouble! For a wife to respect her husband, she shows him unconditional love that helps fuel his desire to return love. He receives his value and honor that is so important to a man. The wife and children respond because she knows they are cared for and cherished. Love is often reciprocal; the husband loves and the wife responds with respect and honor and conversely with the entire family. And, when things are not going well, the wife should and must still respect him (unless there is abuse), as with the husband who must still love, regardless of how the other is being with him. It follows that the relationship will vastly improve!

Submission is respect, and thus is not to exceed the parameters of the will of God or of love and righteousness. To prove this, submission is not an excuse to batter or put wives or anyone down in any way. The directive to husbands is even more daunting than what has been given to the wives in that culture! Husbands are called to *love*, which is much greater in importance and prominence than submission! Love is what sets the tone and standard for the relationship. Submission is also a response! Because the husband is loving, because the husband is caring, because the husband is putting his wife's best interests forward, the wife submits, and he earns her devotion. It is the husband's responsibility to set the tone of love and care! Keep in mind; this was called for in a time and culture that considered women lower than farm animals! It was taught in a culture where the "alpha" male (i.e. the lead man of the family), ruled in absolute dominance for order, organization, structure, protection, and community. The mandate to love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) was, and still is to some, an extreme wakeup call that commands the husband to thoroughly exhibit all of the qualities of biblical character in his relationship with his wife.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How would you define unconditional love? Have you ever felt or experienced it? Have you ever given it?
2. Why should a modern, liberated woman be tender and kind to her husband? How does this show respect to self, spouse, and to God? How would this improve a good and/or a bad marriage?
3. Why should a husband seek to earn his wife's respect with love? How would this improve a good marriage and turn around a bad marriage?
4. How do you feel about submission? How does it work in this passage? How is submission a reflection of what Christ has done for you?
5. How do you feel that Christ has treated you beyond what you deserved or needed? How does this help you with the attitude of submission?
6. Why is it important that children participate in the love of a home by obeying their parents and respecting them?
7. How is our obedience pleasing to our Lord? How could this help you live well and right and not be discouraged or lose hope?
8. Why does this passage also spotlight servants and workers? What happens when they work vigorously and cheerfully?
9. What happens when employers and employees are obedient and willingly respect each other? How does this affect families?
10. How are your work and your actions and attitude showing respect for our Lord too? Have you ever considered that when you work for others, you are also working for Christ?
11. Knowing that what we put in our work will be paid back to us and when we mistreat or manipulate others, our actions will also come back to us motivate you to work better and be more respectful? How would this improve your workplace?
12. How do you feel that God has no favorites? What about that He will not allow us to get away with evil and wrongdoing? Now, what are you going to do about loving and respecting your spouse? Need ideas? Read 1 Corinthians 13 and one day at a time practice one of the aspects of love toward them, whether they deserve it or not!