

Family Relationships (Submission)

Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

Colossians 3:18-4:1 – *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²² Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. ²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for^[a] you serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. ^{4:1} Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”*

Background Notes

Let’s talk about the composition of the church at Colossae. Wives are directly addressed in verse 18, and in verse 19 husbands are directly addressed. Children are addressed in verse 20, and in verse 21 fathers are addressed. In verse 22, servants are directly addressed, and in verse 1 of chapter 4 masters are addressed.

Remember, this letter was written to the church at Colossae in the 1st century, and it would have been read publicly when the entire church was all gathered together. It’s quite obvious that people in all these categories would have been present and listening to the reading of this letter. Christian husbands, Christian wives, Christian children, Christian masters, Christian slaves - all gathered together in the name of Christ.

The Greek word translated “children” (v20) is not the word for babies or little children. It’s the word for youths, and it would include junior highs and teenagers. The fact that they’re all gathered together at the church at Colossae shows that all ages and categories of believers were considered members of the church. The pre-teens and teenagers would have been present for the church gathering.

As members of the Body of Christ, Christian pre-teens and teenagers form a vital part of any church today.

Doctrinal Point

We must relate to God’s authority structures.

If we want to live out the great theme of Colossians by making Christ supreme and all-sufficient in our lives, we’ll have to gain victory over sin in our personal lives (v 1-5). We’ll have to “put off the old man” and “put on the new” (v6-10). We’ll

have to relate properly to fellow believers (v11-17). The next step in making Christ supreme in our lives is to properly submit to God's authority structures (3:18-4:1).

Why do we call it "**God's** authority structures?" It's because **all** authority comes from **God**. Romans 13:1 says, "*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.*" All authority finds its source in God. When the apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans, Emperor Nero was on the throne, but Paul didn't change his message: "*the authorities that exist are appointed by God.*" All authority ultimately finds its source in God, even though evil authorities may use their authority against God. Even abusive authorities still find their ultimate source in God.

God has chosen to channel His authority down to us through four different lines: the family (or home), the church (spiritual authority), the state (civil authority), and labor (the workplace). Our passage here deals with two of these areas: the home and the workplace, or labor. In this session we'll talk about the home.

In reference to the home, the role of wives is found in verse 18. "*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*" Does the Bible actually say to submit? Yes, it does - but it's important to remember that *subordination is not inferiority!* If you submit to someone who is in authority, your submission doesn't mean that you are inferior to that person. To submit is not to take a lower value. Our Lord Jesus, as the Son of God here on earth, submitted to the will of God the Father. He was subordinate. Although He submitted, He was not inferior - He was always equal with the Father.

Notice that verse 18 says: "*as is fitting in the Lord.*" Obviously if a non-Christian husband tells his Christian wife to get an abortion, or to stop worshiping Jesus, she is not required to submit to these orders. For assistance and direction she may turn to another line of authority to which she is subject - the church.

Husbands are addressed in verse 19: "*Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*" Notice what it does *not* say: it doesn't command husbands to force their wives to obey and be subject to them! No, it says husbands are to *love* their wives! That's a command – husbands are to love their wives. In fact, harsh authority leads to bitterness, and husbands are commanded not to be bitter or harsh towards their wives. Wives are like flowers: they wilt under harsh authority, and blossom under tender loving care!

The Greek word used for "love" in this command is "*agape*." It's the kind of love that voluntarily denies self in the interest of others. It's a love of the will. What if a husband were to come to me and tell me that he can't obey this verse because the romance is gone, and the "spark" is not there anymore? Well, so what? He is still to love his wife - as a matter of the **will**. If the romance and the spark are there, that's great! But even if they're not, the command is to love by an act of the will. (More we could say...)

In verse 20, children are directly addressed, and this includes pre-teens and teens. They are to obey ***in all things***. "*Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.*" But suppose a Christian teenager has non-

Christian parents? They are still to obey. Ephesians 6:1 say to obey “*in the Lord,*” so if a non-Christian parent told a Christian teen to stop being a Christian, or to go rob a bank, they are not required to obey. Acts 5:29 certainly applies here: “*We ought to obey God rather than men.*” But notice verse 20: ***obeying your parents is well pleasing to the Lord.*** Can parents be unreasonable? You’d better believe it, they can! But still, obedience to parents is pleasing to the Lord.

In verse 21, there’s a command to fathers. The word “fathers” could be translated “parents,” but most likely fathers are particularly in view here. Fathers are told not to “provoke” their children. Unreasonable demands or constant nagging will provoke or exasperate or embitter your children – often with disastrous results.

Parents, it’s important to be able to flex a little. Let’s not discourage our children. That’s what it says here: “***lest they become discouraged.***” They can lose heart. They can become spiritless. And they can become bitter. You single people, or even teenagers, remember this important point when you become a parent!

Practical Application

Remember the model of our Lord Jesus as a teen!

This application is particularly for teens. Luke 2 relates an event from the life of our Lord when He was almost a teen. In fact, Luke 2 gives us just about the only event in Scripture about the life of our Lord as a young person. When He was twelve years old, He went up to Jerusalem with His parents to celebrate Passover. Mary and Joseph found Him in the Temple, speaking with the Jewish teachers and leaders, but He obediently went back home with them to Nazareth. Luke 2:51 says, “*Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.*” The word usage here means He was “continually subject to them” - and that would carry it right through His teen years.

Think of it—the Son of God, ***subject*** to earthly parents! Do you think Mary and Joseph were ever unreasonable? What parents aren’t unreasonable at times? But our Lord Jesus was continually subject to them!

What a great model to follow! If you’re a teen, memorize Luke 2:51, and follow the great model of our Lord Jesus Christ as a teen.