

Session 7 Bible Study on the book of Colossians (3:17-4:1)

How to honour God in our relationships

¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Instructions for Christian Households

¹⁸Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

²¹Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

²²Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favouritism.

⁴Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Introduction

In our last Session, Session 6 we considered how we should apply our ideas of the supremacy of Christ, and how we were to take off our old selves and put on and embrace characteristics of Christ in our lives. In this session, we're going to look at three specific examples of how that plays out in our lives – specifically in our relationships with others: marriage, parenting, and work. Even if your context is not directly related to these three types of relationships, there are timeless principles we can apply to our lives today in the relationships that matter most to us.

So as always at the beginning, let's lay out what the hopes are from this session :

Head Change: That we know the supremacy of Christ not only changes us on the inside, but it also impacts the way we treat the people in our lives.

Heart Change: That we feel increased affection toward other believers through the power of the Spirit.

Life Change: That we act out the love of Christ in all our relationships so that Jesus is glorified in us and through us.

A little thought as we begin – Have you ever been in a situation where you have had a wake-up call just when you were about to pass judgment on a situation? For example, I have often seen things happen in my own family where I have looked from a distance and thought to myself, "I told them. I knew I was right". But before I could take the high moral ground, something else would happen which made me realise that I also had a responsibility. Well today's passage must be read in its entirety rather than picking off one statement here or there. For example, we can't

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read about wives submitting to their husbands without reading what comes next that Husbands must love their wives. And so let's read the passage with that way of thinking :

Reading – Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

WATCH Session 7 (from 00:26)

So let's begin with context. Women had significantly fewer rights than today and slaves were part of the norm in the Roman Empire. But that doesn't mean that this teaching doesn't apply for today's context.

Let's remind ourselves early on today what Paul said in verse 12, *“¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity”*.

As we look today at any kind of relationship, whether at home, whether with our family members, whether with our work colleagues or bosses, its these virtues that we are clothing ourselves with.

It's not so much about the circumstances that we are in changing, but more about our attitudes and hearts changing to transform how we respond in those situations.

Question – have you experienced God changing you internally through a difficult situation?

It's true that God doesn't always change our external circumstances. This passage might be especially difficult for us to swallow because of a broken marriage, a prodigal child, or an unfair work situation. Or maybe the sting comes from not being in that particular season of life—being single, childless, or jobless. But we can take hope in the fact that God is working in us to make us into the image of Jesus. There's something in this passage for everyone. So let's now look at each of the 3 relationships

Verse 18 – Submission

This word "submit" and its meaning has become so distorted. Many wrongs things have been done in the name of submission. Perhaps the first thing that needs to be said about submission is that it does not cancel out equality. The Greek work *hupotasso* means a willingness to put another person's interests above your own. This word is used in Luke 2:51 to describe Jesus's attitude toward Mary and Joseph—He willingly submitted to them. Paul's appeal to wives isn't about hierarchy, but about living out the principle stated in verse 17 to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, which includes serving and loving their husbands.

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Although it is addressed here to wives, it is not a female word in the Bible but is addressed to men as well. Thus it is not a sexist word.

Everyone must submit to other people. In Ephesians, Paul says Christians are to submit "one to another." The outstanding example of true submission, of course, is seen in how Jesus submits himself to the Father. No one would ever conceive of the idea that Jesus found it a scolding to submit to the Father. He delighted in it. It was voluntary on his part. In no way did he regard it as a threat to the equality which he knew existed between himself and the Father. Therefore, to submit to someone does not mean you are not equal. This is the confusing meaning which the world has poured into this word. Submission does not mean inequality. Literally, it means "put yourself under, arrange yourself under someone, for a good and proper purpose." It is a totally voluntary action.

One of the reasons we are having so many problems in society today is that this concept of support has been distorted and set aside.

Verse 19 – Love

Here again we learn what to put on and what to put off. Put on love! Husbands are to work at this. The key to the husband's role in marriage is contained in Paul's words, "Love your wife." He must give himself to that. Note it does not say, "Make love!" Sex is not the key to marriage. But love is. The word is *agapao*. That is God's word for love. Honour, value, respect, guard, protect, show delight in your wife. This is something a husband is to plan for and work at. It's not the kiss on the cheek at the end of the day. It's not just on Valentines' Day.

Husbands are not to be bitter, resentful or sarcastic toward their wives. These things are especially hurtful to women. You can be sharp with another man and he will shrug it off and not become upset by it. But if you do that with your wife you will cut her deeply, far more than you may realize.

QUESTION - For those who are married, what's difficult about putting your spouse's interests above your own?

Can you think of any friends who personify the selfless service that Paul is talking about here in their marriage.

Paul now moves from Husband & Wives, to Children & Parents.

Verse 20 & 21

What was it like to obey your parents as a kid? Do you sense that this approach has changed for today's young families? Which do you think is better?

Respect for the authority of parents should come from a place where the parents display characteristics that are fair and worth honouring. As parents demonstrate

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honour and glory to God, it gives children the model by which they should honour their parents. It teaches respect for all authority. God knows that this is an immensely important part of life and ought to be taught to children as they are growing up.

Let's read from Proverbs 6:20-22

20 My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

21 Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck.

22 When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you.

The other side of the coin is now taught to the parents in Colossians 3 verse 21.

The word for "embitter" is from the word "to stir up, arouse, or irritate." That does not mean that parents are never to say or do anything that makes their children feel irritated. Discipline can often irritate a child. We must not seek to avoid every instance of that. But this word is given in the present continuous tense. Thus, it is really saying, "Fathers, do not keep on irritating your children. Don't keep hammering away at it, nagging them, or they will become discouraged."

This is an important lesson for parents who can become over protective of their children – that if they put one step out of line they have no air to breathe.

There are at least four things as parents that we can learn in our relationship with our children, and that is :

Do not ignore them – we have got to make time for our children in amongst the busyness of everything else. Without this they may feel unloved, not important and worthless.

Do not indulge your children, giving them everything they want. Children long for guidance and direction; for intimacy, not for superficial indulgence.

Do not insult them, calling them names and putting them down. They will become discouraged and be put off from the things of God.

Demonstrate the love of God through how you are. Without this, their picture of a Father God will be based on what they see in you.

QUESTION – What can we do in our church family to encourage parents more in their challenging role?

Verse 22 – 4:1 Respecting your work and respecting your workers

Context is everything - Slavery in those days wasn't based on race. Rather, people could sell themselves into slavery to pay off debt. They were seen both as people and as property. They could work for and earn their freedom in some cases. Most

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households had several slaves, thus they formed an important part of the economy of the empire. People often ask, why do the Scriptures not directly address the problem of slavery? Why were masters not instructed to free their slaves? The answer is that conditions were not at all ripe for that. Several attempts to increase revolt among the slaves had already occurred in Roman history. The slave, Spartacus, had already led a revolt that was crushed, resulting in even worse conditions for slaves.

Paul says, *“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord”*.

There is a story I read about a missionary in Africa who was responsible for getting the nationals in his area to do certain jobs. He discovered that they were all rather lazy and would only perform while he was actually watching them. When he left they would stop work and do nothing until he returned. But this man had a glass eye, and one day when his eye was irritating him he took it out and put it on a stump. When he returned he found that everybody was still working because the "eye," as they thought, was watching them all the while he was away. That is what Paul means here: eye-service! Working only when the boss is watching. This missionary thought he had found a great way to free himself, until one day he returned to discover that one of the workers had sneaked around from behind and put his hat over the eye, and everyone was lounging around, enjoying themselves. That is eye-service!

In the context of today for workers, we are not to work only while the boss is watching. As the apostle says, whatever we do, we are to work at it "with all our heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since we know that we will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism." We are to work "as unto the Lord." That is to be our motivation.

Similarly, employers should be concerned about how generously and justly they treat their workers! Slaves could over time pay their freedom once their debt was cleared. This came from the encouragement of their masters – not holding on to them, but instead helping them have their right to freedom. Thus, in time, conditions and attitudes toward slavery would change and the practice would disappear from the empire. That, in fact, is what eventually happened. Without a violent overthrow, without revolution of any kind, the preaching and teaching of equality in Christ changed the atmosphere of the Roman Empire and slaves at last were set free.

What would it look like to focus on working for Jesus in all areas of your life?

Louie encouraged us to find purpose in our work, in our families, and in the mundane moments of life through Jesus. We work for Him—for His glory, honor, and fame. All that we do can exalt Him. This week, let's live with this truth at the forefront of our minds.

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Live it out

Pray: Pray about your specific situation in life this week—your relationships, job, school, family. Ask God to teach you how to honour Him in all that you do.

Serve: Pick one person to serve this week. Choose two to three intentional actions you could do to lovingly put that person above yourself.

Work: Whether you're employed or not, take a moment at the beginning of each day to remind yourself that you're working for God. Come up with a way to creatively remind yourself of that truth throughout the day.

Thank: Thank God for your parents, or someone who has acted like a parent to you, this week.

Memorize: Memorize Colossians 3:23–24 this week. Use it to remind yourself that you work for the Lord throughout the day.

²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Further Reading

During our discussions as a group, there was reference to two books which readers may find useful as a follow-up to this study :

- Seasons of a Woman's Life by Lois Evans
- Marriage as God intended by Selwyn Hughes