

The Book of Colossians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: The Christian Household

Colossians 3:18–4:1

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage is a household code, and the teacher's task is to present God's design for the home clearly and warmly, as in a sound study of the Christian home. Paul addresses three pairs of relationships (wives and husbands, children and fathers, servants and masters) and grounds each in the lordship of Christ. The recurring phrases (in the Lord, as is fitting in the Lord, this pleases the Lord, as for the Lord, serving the Lord Christ) are the doctrinal key: the gospel reaches into the most ordinary relationships and transforms them by setting Christ over all of them. The most doctrinally sensitive point is the marriage instruction, where Paul reflects God's design that husbands and wives have distinct, complementary roles. The teacher should present this with clarity and warmth: wives are called to a Christlike submission to their own husbands, husbands to a sacrificial, gentle, self-giving love, and both with full and equal worth before God. Submission is never inferiority, and headship is never domination; the husband's leadership is patterned on the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the church (Ephesians 5:22–33).

Because the topic can be a flashpoint, handle it pastorally and biblically rather than defensively. Show that the same Scripture that distinguishes roles insists on the equal dignity of men and women, both made in God's image, both heirs together of grace (1 Peter 3:7; Galatians 3:28). The distinctness of roles, in the home and (as the wider New Testament teaches) in the church, reflects God's good design and is for the flourishing and order of His people, not the devaluing of anyone. Avoid both errors: the worldly distortion that turns headship into harshness and control, and the worldly pressure to erase the roles God has established. Keep the warmth of a study of the Christian home, where these instructions are received as a gift and a calling, not a grievance.

The formational aim is homes and relationships visibly under the lordship of Christ. Paul wants every member of the household, the powerful and the vulnerable alike, to take up their own calling faithfully, serving Christ in the ordinary work of family and labor. Aim the lesson there. Send students home ready to fulfill their own God-given role rather than tallying what others owe them, treating those in their care with gentleness, working as for the Lord, and letting Christ be truly Lord of the kitchen table, the nursery, and the workplace.

Question 1

Student Question:

Throughout this passage Paul repeats phrases like in the Lord, as is fitting in the Lord, this pleases the Lord, and serving the Lord Christ (3:18–24). What does it change about every

relationship in the home when we see them as lived before and for Christ, rather than merely as arrangements between people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Before examining the individual instructions, help students see the thread that ties the whole passage together: the lordship of Christ over every relationship. Count the repeated phrases with them, in the Lord, as is fitting in the Lord, this pleases the Lord, fearing the Lord, as for the Lord, serving the Lord Christ. Christ is named in connection with every role.

This is the doctrinal heart of the household code. Paul is not merely giving good advice on family management; he is bringing the reign of Christ, established earlier in the letter, into the most ordinary rooms of life. The same Christ who is the image of God and the head of the church is also Lord of the kitchen, the nursery, and the workplace.

Draw out the transformation this works. When relationships are lived before and for Christ, they are no longer merely transactions between people, with each party calculating what they are owed. A wife's respect, a husband's love, a child's obedience, a worker's diligence become acts of service to the Lord. This lifts the ordinary into worship and changes our motive from pleasing people (or winning) to pleasing Christ.

It also gives our roles stability. If I serve my family for Christ's sake, I can keep serving faithfully even when others do not hold up their end, because my obedience is finally rendered to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lordship of Christ as the thread tying every household relationship together
- The gospel reaching into ordinary relationships, not just religious activities
- Relationships lived for Christ becoming acts of worship rather than mere transactions
- Faithfulness to our role grounded in serving Christ, even when others fail their part

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul keep mentioning the Lord in every household instruction?
- How does serving Christ change a relationship from a transaction into worship?
- How does serving for Christ's sake help us stay faithful even when others fail?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul assumes Christ should be Lord of our ordinary relationships, not just our religious activities. Where, honestly, is Christ least the Lord in your home life right now? What would consciously bringing Him into that relationship or routine actually look like this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the lordship of Christ into the student's own home, asking where Christ is least Lord. Many believers who would never miss worship have rooms in their home life where Christ's lordship rarely enters: how they speak to a spouse, how they handle conflict, how they treat their children when tired, the atmosphere they create.

Help students locate the specific room honestly. Often it is the relationship or routine where we are most comfortable and therefore least guarded, where the old self reasserts itself most easily. Naming it is the first step.

Then make Christ's lordship concrete there. Bringing Christ into a relationship might mean praying before a hard conversation, choosing gentleness when irritation rises, asking forgiveness, or simply remembering that the person across the table belongs to the Lord. Encourage one specific way to consciously submit a home relationship or routine to Christ this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rooms of home life where Christ's lordship rarely enters
- The places we are most comfortable as the places the old self reasserts itself
- Making Christ's lordship concrete in a specific relationship
- One specific way to submit a home routine to Christ this week

Discussion Prompts

- Where is Christ least the Lord in your home life right now?
- Why do our closest relationships often get our least Christlike behavior?
- What would bringing Christ into that relationship look like this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says, wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord, and husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them (3:18–19). What does each of these instructions actually call for, and why does Paul give a command to both the wife and the husband rather than to only one of them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul addresses wives and husbands together: wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord, and husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them (3:18–19). Take each in turn, and note that Paul speaks to both, not just one.

To the wife, Paul says submit, as is fitting in the Lord. Biblical submission is a voluntary, willing deference to her husband's leadership, offered as part of her devotion to Christ. It is not

coerced, not a denial of her worth or intelligence, and not submission to sin or abuse. The qualifier as is fitting in the Lord keeps it within the bounds of her higher allegiance to Christ.

To the husband, Paul gives two commands: love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. The husband's leadership is to be exercised as love, and Paul explicitly forbids harshness, a bitterness or severity that wounds. In Ephesians 5 Paul fills this out: the husband loves as Christ loved the church, giving Himself up for her. So the husband's role is not privilege to be enjoyed but a costly call to sacrificial, tender love.

Stress why Paul commands both. The gospel does not hand the husband power and tell the wife to cope; it lays a serious, Christ-shaped calling on each. The home flourishes when both fulfill their God-given part. Save the deeper why (God's design, equal worth, submission and headship rightly understood) for the heavier question at Q9; here, focus on what each is actually called to do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Biblical submission as willing, Christ-motivated deference, not coercion or a denial of worth
- The qualifier as is fitting in the Lord, keeping submission within allegiance to Christ
- The husband's love and the explicit prohibition of harshness
- Commands given to both husband and wife, each with a Christ-shaped calling

Discussion Prompts

- What does biblical submission actually involve, and what does it not mean?
- Why does Paul specifically warn husbands against harshness?
- Why does Paul address both the wife and the husband rather than only one?

Question 4

Student Question:

Whatever your situation, married or not, God has placed you in relationships with their own God-given responsibilities. Where are you falling short of your own role, focusing more on what others owe you than on what God has asked of you? What would it look like to take up your part faithfully, regardless of whether others take up theirs?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question widens the application beyond marriage so that everyone in the room can engage, married or single. God has placed each of us in relationships with their own God-given responsibilities, and the human tendency is to focus on what others owe us rather than on what God asks of us.

Help students turn the spotlight onto their own role. Whatever the relationship, marriage, family, friendship, work, the question is not first whether the other person is doing their part,

but whether I am doing mine. Much relational frustration comes from keeping a ledger of the other's failures while neglecting our own calling.

Then point to the freedom of taking up our part regardless. Because we serve the Lord and not merely the other person, we can fulfill our role faithfully even when others do not reciprocate. This is not doormat passivity (Scripture also addresses wrongdoing and injustice) but a refusal to make our obedience conditional on others. Encourage students to name one role they have been neglecting and one faithful step to take up their part this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God-given responsibilities in every relationship, for married and single alike
- The tendency to focus on what others owe us rather than our own calling
- Taking up our part faithfully because we serve the Lord, not only the other person
- Faithfulness to our role distinguished from passive acceptance of wrongdoing

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you more focused on what others owe you than on your own calling?
- What is one role you have been neglecting?
- How can serving the Lord free you to take up your part even when others do not?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says, children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord, and fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (3:20–21). Why does Paul tie a child's obedience to pleasing the Lord, and why does he warn parents specifically against provoking and discouraging their children?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul turns to children and parents: children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord, and fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (3:20–21). Again, both sides are addressed.

To children, Paul commands obedience, and he grounds it not merely in practicality but in pleasing the Lord. Honoring and obeying parents is part of a child's devotion to God; it is one of the first ways a young person learns to submit to God Himself. The phrase in everything is bounded, as always, by higher allegiance to the Lord, but its thrust is a real, glad obedience.

To fathers (and by extension parents), Paul gives a striking warning: do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Parental authority can be misused in ways that crush rather than nurture, through constant criticism, harshness, unfairness, impossible standards, or

anger, with the result that a child loses heart. Paul takes the discouragement of children seriously.

Help students see the balance. The home needs both the child's obedience and the parent's nurturing restraint. Authority is real, but it is given for the building up of the child, not for the parent's convenience or control. The goal is children who are both obedient and encouraged, raised in a home where authority serves love.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A child's obedience as part of devotion to God and as pleasing the Lord
- The first lessons in submitting to God learned through honoring parents
- The warning against provoking and discouraging children
- Parental authority given for nurture, not for the parent's convenience or control

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul connect a child's obedience to pleasing the Lord?
- What are some ways parents provoke and discourage their children?
- How can a home hold together both real obedience and genuine encouragement?

Question 6

Student Question:

Whether your parents are living or not, and whether or not you have children, this passage speaks to you. How are you doing at honoring your parents, or at nurturing rather than discouraging those in your care? What is one specific way you could better fulfill that calling this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question applies the parent-child instructions broadly, since everyone has parents and many have others in their care. Honoring parents is a lifelong calling that changes shape over time but never expires; even adult children, and those whose parents have died, can honor their parents in attitude, gratitude, and memory.

Help students examine their own practice. Those with living parents can consider how they speak to and about them, how they care for them, whether they honor them. Those with children or others in their care can ask whether they are nurturing or discouraging, building up or wearing down.

Then move toward one concrete step: a call or visit to a parent, a word of honor, a change in how they speak to a child, an apology for harshness, more encouragement and less criticism. Be sensitive to those with painful family histories; honoring is not the same as pretending wrongs

did not happen, but the calling to honor, where possible, remains. Encourage one specific, doable step this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honoring parents as a lifelong calling that outlasts childhood
- Honoring even parents who have died, through gratitude and memory
- Examining whether we nurture or discourage those in our care
- Sensitivity to painful family histories alongside the abiding call to honor

Discussion Prompts

- How are you doing at honoring your parents in this season of life?
- If you have others in your care, are you nurturing or discouraging them?
- What is one specific step toward fulfilling that calling this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul tells servants to work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing they serve the Lord Christ and will receive an inheritance as their reward, and he tells masters to be just and fair, remembering they too have a Master in heaven (3:22–4:1). Setting aside the ancient setting, what enduring principles does this give us for how Christians should approach their work and how those in authority should treat those under them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's longest instruction goes to servants, with a matching word to masters (3:22–4:1). The cultural setting is ancient household servitude, which is not the same as the later race-based slavery of modern history, and the New Testament elsewhere undermines the whole institution (consider Philemon, and 1 Timothy 1:10). But the enduring principles for work and authority are rich and clear.

For those who serve and work, Paul gives a transforming vision: work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, with sincerity rather than mere eye-service to impress a boss, knowing that the Lord Christ is the true Master and will give the inheritance as reward. This reframes all honest work. The Christian's ultimate employer is Christ; therefore work is done with integrity, diligence, and wholeheartedness, whether or not anyone is watching, and even ordinary labor becomes service to the Lord.

For those in authority, Paul tells masters to be just and fair, remembering that they too have a Master in heaven. Earthly authority is always accountable to a higher Authority. Paul adds that God shows no partiality and that the wrongdoer will be repaid, so neither the powerful nor the lowly can presume on their position; all stand under the same impartial Judge.

Draw out the application for today: employees serve Christ through honest, diligent work; employers and all who hold authority must treat those under them justly and fairly, knowing they answer to God. The workplace, like the home, is brought under the lordship of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ancient setting distinguished from later race-based slavery; the New Testament's undermining of the institution (Philemon; 1 Timothy 1:10)
- Work done heartily as for the Lord, with integrity rather than mere eye-service
- Christ as the Christian's true Master and rewarder of honest work
- Authority accountable to the Master in heaven; God's impartial judgment of powerful and lowly alike

Discussion Prompts

- What enduring principles for work does this passage give us today?
- What does it mean to work as for the Lord rather than to impress people?
- How should the reminder that we all have a Master in heaven shape those in authority?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says, whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord. Think about your daily work, paid or unpaid. Do you do it as service to Christ, or merely to please people, earn a paycheck, or get by? How would seeing Christ as your true employer change the way you work this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes work heartily, as for the Lord into the student's daily labor, paid or unpaid. Most people relate to their work primarily as a means to an end, a paycheck, a reputation, or simply getting through the day. Paul offers a radically different frame: Christ is your true employer.

Help students consider how this reframes their work. If the Lord is the one we ultimately serve, then quality, honesty, and diligence matter even when no human is watching; complaining and corner-cutting become out of place; and even menial or unrecognized work gains dignity, because it is offered to Christ. This applies to the office, the job site, the classroom, the home, and the volunteer task alike.

Then make it concrete. Encourage students to name how seeing Christ as their employer would change one specific thing about how they work this week, perhaps more integrity in a task they cut corners on, a better attitude toward a frustrating job, more care in unseen work, or doing an unrecognized duty as worship. The goal is to turn ordinary labor into service rendered to the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Work commonly seen only as a means to an end
- Christ as the true employer reframing quality, honesty, and diligence
- Dignity given to menial and unrecognized work offered to Christ
- One concrete change in how we work this week

Discussion Prompts

- Do you work as service to Christ, or mainly to please people and get by?
- How would seeing Christ as your true employer change your work?
- What is one specific way to work as for the Lord this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

In the marriage instructions Paul reflects God's design that husbands and wives have distinct, complementary roles (3:18–19). How does Scripture present these roles in a way that honors the full and equal worth of both, so that submission is never about inferiority and a husband's leadership is never about domination but about Christlike, sacrificial love (compare Ephesians 5:22–33)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question carries the heaviest doctrinal weight of the lesson, and it should be handled with clarity, warmth, and pastoral wisdom, as in a sound study of the Christian home. Paul's marriage instructions reflect God's design that husbands and wives have distinct, complementary roles, and our task is to present this design in a way that is both faithful and winsome.

Begin with equal worth. Scripture is emphatic that men and women are equally made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), equally fallen, equally redeemed, and fellow heirs of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7; Galatians 3:28). Distinct roles do not imply unequal value any more than the distinct roles within the Godhead imply that the Son is less than the Father. Establish this first, because every distortion of biblical roles begins by forgetting it.

Then present the roles themselves. The wife is called to a willing submission to her own husband's leadership, and the husband to a sacrificial, gentle, self-giving love that, as Ephesians 5:25–30 makes plain, is patterned on Christ's love for the church, a love that gives itself up for her good. Headship in Scripture is not the right to dominate, demand, or please oneself; it is the call to lead by serving, to bear responsibility, and to lay down one's life for one's wife as Christ did for the church. The model of authority in the kingdom is always the towel and the basin, never the heavy hand (Mark 10:42–45). So submission is never about inferiority, and headship is never about domination.

Address the two errors directly. On one side is the worldly distortion that twists headship into harshness, control, or selfishness; Paul explicitly forbids this when he tells husbands not to be harsh, and a husband who lords it over his wife has abandoned the very pattern of Christ. On the other side is the cultural pressure to erase the roles God established altogether, treating any distinction as oppression. Scripture does neither; it honors the full equality of men and women while maintaining the distinct, complementary roles God designed for the flourishing and order of the home.

It is appropriate, gently and without harshness, to note that this same God-given pattern of distinct roles extends to the life of the church, where the New Testament reserves the work of elders and the public teaching authority over the assembled congregation to qualified men (1 Timothy 2:11–12; 3:1–7). This is not a statement about the worth, gifts, or importance of women, whose service is vital throughout the body, but about the order God has established. Keep the tone that of marveling at God’s wise design, not of scoring points. Help students see these roles not as a grievance to be managed but as a good gift to be received, a design that, when embraced in love and submission to Christ, brings beauty, stability, and joy to the Christian home.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The full and equal worth of men and women, both made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 3:7)
- Distinct, complementary roles by God’s design, not a ranking of value
- Submission as willing deference, never a statement of inferiority
- Headship as Christlike, sacrificial servant-leadership (Ephesians 5:25–30; Mark 10:42–45), never domination
- Rejecting both distortions: headship twisted into harshness, and the erasure of God-given roles
- The same pattern of distinct roles extending to the church, where eldership and public teaching authority over the congregation are reserved to qualified men (1 Timothy 2:11–12; 3:1–7), without diminishing the vital service of women

Discussion Prompts

- How does Scripture hold together the equal worth of men and women and their distinct roles?
- Why is submission never about inferiority, and headship never about domination?
- How does the example of Christ reshape what a husband’s leadership should look like?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this passage. Paul brings the lordship of Christ into the kitchen, the nursery, and the workplace, calling each of us to serve Him in the ordinary relationships of daily life. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Colossians 3:18–4:1 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the passage: the lordship of Christ brought into the kitchen, the nursery, and the workplace, with each member of the household called to serve Him in ordinary relationships. The student's task is to name one specific way Christ is forming them through it.

Walk back through the passage as a prompt. Some students most need to let Christ be Lord of a particular home relationship. Some need to take up their own role rather than tallying what others owe them. Some need to honor a parent or stop discouraging a child. Some need to work as for the Lord. Some, married, most need to embrace God's design for husband or wife with fresh love. Let each name what meets them.

Close by reminding students that the goal is formation, not information. Paul wrote so that the gospel would actually change how people treat the person across the kitchen table. Invite each to carry one truth into the week and to let Christ be Lord, concretely, in the ordinary rooms of their lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lordship of Christ in the ordinary relationships of home and work as the lesson's arc
- Formation, not mere information, as the goal
- Carrying one concrete truth into the week
- Letting Christ be Lord in the everyday rooms of life

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage most needs to take root in you this week?
- In which relationship is Christ asking to be more fully Lord?
- How can this group support you in serving Christ at home and at work?