

The Book of Colossians

Lesson 11: The Christian Household -- Colossians 3:18-4:1

It is one thing to be a saint on Sunday morning, surrounded by people on their best behavior. It is another thing entirely to be a saint on Tuesday night, when the dishes are piled up, the children are cranky, the spouse is short-tempered, and everyone has run out of patience. Paul knows this. Having lifted our eyes to the reigning Christ and clothed us in His character, he now walks us straight through the front door and into the ordinary rooms of the home. Because if the gospel cannot reshape the way a husband speaks to his wife or the way a parent treats a child, then it has not really reached the places where life is actually lived.

So Paul takes the three closest relationships of the ancient household, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, and he addresses each one directly. And notice something easy to miss: he speaks to everyone. He does not lecture only the wives or only the children. He turns and addresses husbands, fathers, and masters too, the very people who held the power in that world. The gospel does not simply hand authority to the strong; it lays a claim on everyone, and it lays the heaviest claims of love and gentleness on those with the most power.

There is one phrase that keeps surfacing, like a thread woven through the whole fabric: in the Lord, as is fitting in the Lord, this pleases the Lord, fearing the Lord, as for the Lord. Over and over, Christ is named as the One who changes everything. A wife's respect, a husband's tenderness, a child's obedience, a worker's diligence, none of it is finally about the other person. It is about Christ. We are, Paul says at the heart of it, serving the Lord Christ. The most ordinary household task becomes worship when it is done for Him.

These are warm and beautiful instructions, and they cut against the grain of a world that is forever telling us to look out for ourselves. Paul shows us homes where wives and husbands honor one another, where parents nurture rather than crush, where work is done with integrity, and where the lurking Master in heaven watches over it all with perfect justice. Read this passage with the people you live with in mind. The Christ who holds the universe together also wants to hold your home together, and He starts with the way you treat the person across the kitchen table.

Group Discussion: Paul addresses not only wives, children, and servants, but also husbands, fathers, and masters, the ones who held the power in that culture (3:18-4:1). What does it tell us about the gospel that it speaks to everyone in the household and lays its strongest demands of love and gentleness on those with the most power?

Personal Reflection: Paul roots every household relationship in Christ: in the Lord, as for the Lord, serving the Lord Christ. Is Christ actually Lord of your home and your closest relationships,

or is He more like an honored guest you welcome on Sundays? Where would your family life look different this week if Christ were truly Lord of it?

Read Colossians 3:18–4:1

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Ephesians 5:22-33, marriage as a picture of Christ and the church; Ephesians 6:1-9, children, fathers, servants, and masters before the Lord; 1 Peter 3:1-7, wives and husbands living together in honor; Genesis 2:18-24, God's design for man and woman; Philippians 2:3-8, the humble, self-giving mind of Christ.