

Pursue Christ at Home

April 6, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Colossians 3:18–4:1

Session Outline

1. Wives and Husbands (Colossians 3:18-19)
2. Children and Parents (Colossians 3:20-21)
3. Slaves and Masters (Colossians 3:22–4:1)

Theological Theme

In our text today, Paul gave instructions on how to create and foster God-honoring relationships in the home, addressing three household codes that were foundational to society in Paul's day.

Call to Action

God's design for the household is counterintuitive to our world. Our struggle is to believe God's plan for the home will always be best and lead to our flourishing. Consider the relationships in your home and determine where you are choosing the wisdom of the world over God's plan for human flourishing.



Leader Guide

Pursue Christ at Home

Introduction

In today's study, we're going to discuss the way family members relate to one another in a biblically functioning home. When every member of a household chooses to live in relationship with one another in the way God intended, a gospel-centered family emerges. When a home is inhabited by a gospel-centered family, there's less tension and more laughter, less independence and more interaction, less instability and unwavering stability, and less need for rules and more freedom.

- Who was the most well-respected person in your home when you were growing up—your mom, your dad, one of your siblings, or you? Why was that the case?
- What rule did your parents establish that led to you being punished most often when you were a teenager? Why did you choose to break that rule?

Session Summary

Paul's writing today addressed household relationships and how to conduct ourselves within them. We are first commanded to submit to Christ, showing love and seeking to walk within His will. Following that first and most important instruction, Paul's letter to the Colossians addressed three types of household relationships the Colossians would be familiar with in their society and how to honor God within them.

1. Wives and Husbands (Colossians 3:18-19)

- What does it mean for a wife to love her husband "as is fitting to the Lord" (v. 18)? Why is this crucial to understanding biblical submission?
- How did Paul's instruction to husbands work with his exhortation to wives?

Many modern believers read this passage and bristle. The idea of "submitting" rubs us the wrong way today. So, what does it mean in this

instance? It's natural to interpret what we read in the Bible through the lens of our current culture—and what we consider “right” and “good” today—but let's take our 2025 glasses off and look at what Paul was saying here—and what he wasn't.

In our reading today, Paul gave instructions regarding something scholars call “household codes.” Remember that his letter to the Colossian church was written to a group of believers, so everyone Paul addressed was first submitting to the Lord, who has ultimate authority.¹

In our first section of text today, we'll look at the first household code Paul addressed: wives and husbands. Marriage relationships are healthiest when operating together and for the good of the marriage. Paul's writing in Colossians adds depth to the cohesive marriage relationship God has in mind for us.

What does it mean for wives to submit to their husbands? When we hear the word submit, our minds often conjure up a picture of a doormat. This idea simply isn't congruent with God's design. In God's design of marriage as “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5), part of the body isn't trying to walk over and control another part of the body. That is not honoring or putting the other person first.

While verses like this have sometimes been used in hurtful ways, it is important for us to understand what this means. This instruction to submit isn't an invitation to control or a means of subjugation. This doesn't create an environment where the husband is tyrannical and the wife blindly follows. This also does not suggest that a wife is inferior to her husband. And it certainly does not allow for abuse or mistreatment, which is outside of God's desire and design.

God's design for order in the marriage relationship includes a leadership hierarchy, with the husband as the loving leader of the household. In this design, the wife joyfully submits to her husband's leadership. In Ephesians 5, Paul gives similar instructions with important framing context: “submitting to one another in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). In God's design for a healthy relationship, both the husband and wife are submitted both to the Lord and to one another.

This instruction to submit is immediately followed by one that is just as important: “Husbands, love your wives” (Colossians 3:19). Love is foundational to the way we show up as believers. Jesus didn't just love those who loved Him back and treated Him well, He loved even those who did not love Him (Matthew 5:43-44). Jesus's love is unconditional

Shared Responsibility


As in Ephesians 5:21–6:9, Paul arranged his discussion to treat the subordinate person first (wife, child, or slave). Paul immediately followed each statement with a reminder of the responsibility of the second member of each pair. The distinctly Christian contribution to the ordering of family life was the stress on reciprocal responsibilities. Even in culture where family relationships were given an importance and significance not widespread in antiquity, it was generally assumed that husbands and fathers had rights to be exercised but few duties. Wives and children assumed they had duties but no or few rights. Paul stressed that all household members had rights and duties.

and endures through hardship. This type of love embodies the characteristics Paul laid out in 1 Corinthians 13.


We are all called to love others like this, and this is the type of love Paul had in mind in verse 19. God's design for the marriage relationship includes husbands loving their wives this way. This involves caring for them and not becoming "bitter toward them" (v. 19). This type of love honors and treats with kindness.


In God's design for marriage, both of Paul's instructions work in tandem. When a husband is truly loving his wife the way he is called to, submitting joyfully is no longer a grating, unpleasant idea for a wife. When a wife submitting to his leadership in joint pursuit of Jesus, love and gentleness come more naturally, and bitterness becomes harder to hold on to.

This is God's good design, but we live in a fallen world. This is not always the reality in marriages, even ones between two Christians. Creating this ecosystem of mutual love and respect takes continuous work but worthwhile work.

 Application: How have you seen these traits present in a godly marriage?

2. Children and Parents (Colossians 3:20-21)

 What does it look like for children to obey their parents at various stages in life (v. 20)?

 Why is it important that parents not exasperate their children (v. 21)?

In this part of our text today, Paul's letter addressed another portion of his audience: households with children. The children Paul's instruction had in mind here are minors,² though Scripture speaks elsewhere on the universal command to honor your parents, no matter your age (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 19:19).

To honor your parents is to respect them, and one way to do this, as a minor, is to obey. This is written not as an option but as a command for children. When children obey their parents in all things, "this pleases the Lord" (v. 20).

As we discussed with the wife and husband relationship, Paul's writing presents a hierarchy of leadership in the home, with parents, both fathers and mothers, as the leaders. God's good design for this part of the

household is that parents fully submit to the Lord, and in turn creating a safe, stable, loving, and godly household for the children living in it.

This command to obey does not extend into harmful or wrong circumstances. Asking a child to step outside of God's will or do something that is outside of God's design is not what Paul had in mind here. This behavior would not be pleasing to the Lord, and applying this verse in that way is a gross misinterpretation.

As with the first household code, in the second, there is a joint responsibility: children should obey, and parents should not "exasperate" (v. 21) their children.

What the CSB translates as "fathers" in verse 21 could be translated as parents; it is translated that way in Hebrews 11:23.³ The idea here is that parents should create an environment where it is as easy as possible to obey. Anyone who has had to task a child with cleaning a dirty room or completing homework before playing video games knows not all situations will be considered "easy," but parents should do their best not to make life more difficult for their children.

Paul specifically wrote that this type of exasperation can cause children to become discouraged, and it is the parents' role to encourage their children, not discourage them. Other translations use words like provoke (ESV), embitter (NIV), or aggravate (NLT) to describe this discouragement. Discouraged children can be fertile ground for the enemy and the world to plant seeds that, when watered, can turn children away from the Lord as they mature.⁴

In our broken world, in many homes this traditional model of two parents raising children is not the reality. Yet, even in homes without both parents present, this same principle and ecosystem of love and obedience is still God's best.

- ❓ Application: For those who are parents, how have you seen this dynamic play out with your own children? For those who are not, how did you see these dynamics at play in your home growing up?

3. Slaves and Masters (Colossians 3:22–4:1)

- ❓ What does it mean to not work "only while being watched" (v. 22)? Why does this matter?
- ❓ What does it mean to live our everyday routines for the Lord (v. 23)?

With the echoes of the unjust history of American slavery still reverberating in our culture today, this can be a hard section to read. It is important to understand that Paul addressed this household code because it was an established reality in his culture, not because he endorsed the idea of slavery as we know it or even the idea of slavery in his own day.

In fact, the letter of Colossians was delivered by a runaway slave, Onesimus, who Paul called “my son” (Philemon 1:10), and for whom Paul advocated forgiveness and fair treatment.⁵ You can read more about this in the book of Philemon, which Paul also wrote.

Notice that Paul’s instructions here also demanded mutuality: a slave should obey, working hard, and a master should be just and fair in his dealings. Both elements were necessary for this relationship to function in as healthy a way as possible under the cultural construct of the time. Masters in this day would have had complete control over their slaves, even holding the ability to put them to death for any reason, but God held them to a higher standard: just and fair treatment.⁶

The big idea was this: The very most important thing both slave and master could do in Paul’s day was conduct themselves as Christ commands and Scripture teaches. While they were equal as brothers and sisters in Christ (Galatians 3:28), their society placed them on different tiers, and Paul’s instruction offered a path to exist in that structure in a way that created order and peace and honored the Lord.

We can still glean things for our lives today from this text. While we no longer have slave masters in America, we still exist in workplaces and environments where our hard work should glorify Christ. We have a similar call to follow orders, work hard even when no one is looking over our shoulder, and work as if we’re working for the Lord. As Paul said in verse 24, ultimately, we serve Christ, and He calls us to a higher standard than the world holds itself to. When we are fully submitted to Jesus and living for Him, we will conduct ourselves this way, bringing glory to the Lord. We will be rewarded for this faithfulness (v. 24) and can rest assured that any injustice done will be paid back on the day of judgement (v. 25).



Application: How can we apply this teaching to our lives now?

Conclusion

Paul addressed the three main household codes in his day in our text today. Yet, none of his instructions created a dictatorial or oppressive relationship. In all, the assumption was that everyone was fully surrendered to Jesus and submitting to the Lord's authority, creating God-honoring relationships free from mistreatment.

- ❓ For married couples and/or parents, how can you apply God's teaching today? What about for those who are single or do not have children of their own? How can you support and encourage these relationships within our church body?
- ❓ How can we foster a culture of mutual love and submission within our church body as we submit to Jesus's authority together?
- ❓ How can living in the ways Paul instructed give us opportunity to share the gospel with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank God that He has given us the best way to live in every area. Ask for His help as you go out and seek to conduct your life, in all your relationships, in a way that is honoring to Him.

Memory Verse

Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people. —Colossians 3:23

Additional Resources

- *Be Complete* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* by Richard Melick
- *Colossians and Philemon* by G. K. Beale

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Colossians

Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

Extended Commentary

Colossians 3:18–4:1

3:18 Paul exhorted wives to submit themselves to their husbands (Eph 5:21–24). Paul always used this verb in the context of authority relationships (Rm 8:7; 10:3; 13:1, 5; 1Co 14:34; 15:27–28; 16:16; Php 3:21; Ti 2:5, 9; 3:1). This submission is not subservience but voluntary subordination. This disposition is based on the wife’s relationship with Christ and her role within the family (as is fitting in the Lord) rather than on a false notion of inferiority (1Co 11:3, 7–9; see Eph 5:22–24).

3:19 Coupled with his exhortation for wives, Paul admonished husbands to love your wives, with the additional warning not to become bitter toward them. “Love” refers to selfless sacrificial concern and care for the welfare of another person (Eph 5:25–33). “Bitterness” pertains to harsh treatment and could be translated as “to cause bitter feelings.” Husbands must always care for their wives and never deal harshly with them (1Pt 3:7).

3:20 The word obey lacks the voluntary sense found in the command to be submissive. Children must be obedient to their parents (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16; Eph 6:1–3); this is how they please the Lord. This obedience does not include immoral or idolatrous demands from a parent, because this is not behavior pleasing to the Lord.

3:21 Although the term fathers could include both parents (Heb 11:23), fathers in particular are warned to not exasperate their children (Eph 6:4). “Exasperate” means to cause or provoke someone to harbor feelings of resentment. The reason for this injunction is so that children do not become discouraged or disheartened. Fathers must avoid dealing harshly with them.

3:22–25 Some interpreters believe slaves in the ancient world might not have been hard workers since they did not profit personally from their labor. Paul offered an extensive rationale for exhorting Christian slaves to obey their earthly masters in everything: (1) slaves are to work even when unsupervised, because they are ultimately serving the Lord rather than a human master; (2) their service to the Lord will be gloriously rewarded in eternity; and (3) God does not discriminate when it comes to punishing bad behavior. These instructions are paralleled in Eph 6:5–8.

4:1 Paul exhorted masters to deal justly with their slaves because they themselves have a Master in heaven. See also Eph 6:9.⁷

References

1. Naomi Cramer Overton, Misty Arterburn, and Stephen Arterburn, eds., *NLT Every Woman’s Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2024), 1516.
2. Thomas Constable, “Notes on Colossians, 2025 Edition,” [Soniclight.com](https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/colossians/colossians.htm), accessed February 5, 2025, <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/colossians/colossians.htm>.
3. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1898.
4. Wiersbe, *Be Complete*, 144.
5. Wiersbe, 146.
6. Constable, “Notes on Colossians, 2025 Edition.”
7. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” 1898.