

Lesson 6 Commentary

Living in Community

Colossians 3:18–4:18

Paul had given the Colossian believers some basic instructions: to bear with one another, forgive, and let peace rule in their hearts. Then, he went on to write more specifically about various types of relationships.

Wives and Husbands

Classic Greek culture dictated that men, assumed to be superior, rule over their wives and daughters. And in Jewish society, a woman was under her father's or husband's authority. In both Greek and Jewish communities, men held the cultural privileges and esteem. But Jesus challenged these cultural assumptions (see 3:11; Galatians 3:28). The truth that men and women are equal in Christ has huge implications for marriage. Paul addressed these in his brief but radical instructions for wives and husbands.

Submit means “to voluntarily yield to another.” Paul said that wives should submit “as is fitting in the Lord.” Paul did not mean that wives should let their husbands lead them into sin. Rather, they are supposed to submit in a way that pleases the Lord. Notice also that the wife is to submit to *her husband*. Paul did not say that all women should submit to all men, nor was he saying women were inferior to men. *Submit* is not a devaluing term. Jesus modeled submission to the Father (see Philippians 2:6, 8). Yet in no way was He diminished or demeaned. Likewise, biblical submission within marriage is never a question of value. Simply stated, it is one equal voluntarily yielding to another for God's glory.

In Paul's day, parents generally arranged marriages. These unions were often more of a business deal than a loving relationship. Greek cultural values did not encourage husbands to love their wives. Greek laws did not keep men from treating women badly. So the idea that a Christian man was obligated to love his wife and treat her well was radical news! The word Paul used to describe this love is the same word Christ used to describe His love for His disciples: John 13:34 says, “Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” If we love as Jesus loves, there is no room for ego, manipulation, or cruelty. Committed love requires full, selfless participation.

Children and Parents

Next, Paul spoke about the parent-child relationship. God knew that parenting would be difficult. So He inspired Paul to provide simple, practical instruction for children and parents alike.

Paul gave young people only one rule—to obey their parents. This obedience “pleases the Lord.” As long as obeying their parents does not conflict with God's other commands, children are to obey their parents every time, in everything. Because children are to obey their parents in everything, they need protection from abusive or selfish parents. So Paul warned fathers not to provoke and discourage their children. Obviously, this instruction applies to mothers, too.



Think about causing discouragement. Parents need to be careful with their words and actions. Sometimes parents say one thing while doing another. They may fail to keep their promises. Or they may abruptly change rules or expectations. These things can cause children to become bitter or discouraged. Unrealistic demands or endless criticism can frustrate children or even cause them to rebel. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience help to raise children who submit willingly to God's and their parents' authority.

Bondservants and Masters

Paul did not condone slavery. However, he still used bondservants and masters as examples. By doing this, he was telling people how to live godly lives in an ungodly social structure. The principles he outlined still apply to workers and employers today. Paul first spoke to those who served others. He addressed three vital issues: motivation, attitude, and compensation. Paul knew that the bondservants in the Colossian church revered God. Because of this, they were to work with as much excellence when they were alone as when their master was watching. When believers obey those in authority over them, they show respect for Christ.

Workers' relationships with Jesus should also affect their attitudes. Bondservants are to obey their masters with sincere hearts. They can approach the work they do for others with the same attitude they have toward the work they do for God. Any lasting reward for work comes from the Lord. This promise does not mean that believers should not expect earthly pay (see 1 Timothy 5:18). But sometimes wages are unfair—or in the case of slaves, nonexistent. In those times we can know that God sees our work and His compensation is always just. Colossians 3:25 also reminds us that we are still accountable to God. He sees both our honorable and dishonorable work. Paul also exhorted those in authority. God expects supervisors to be fair to those they oversee. Even leaders of businesses and nations are accountable to God. He is their “Master in heaven” who cares about how they treat others.



Think about attitudes toward work. When we know we're working for the Lord—not just to feed our families or make other people rich—our work has new significance. Even the most menial task done “heartily” for God has spiritual value. Our willingness to work diligently and faithfully is an offering to God. Doing good work cheerfully is also a powerful testimony to the people around us.

Final Instructions

Before giving his final greetings, Paul offered some last instructions. First, he exhorted the Colossian church to remain a praying church. He connected watchfulness to prayer. *Watchful* here literally means “to stay awake.” Then, for the sixth time in this letter, Paul reminded the believers to be thankful. Thankfulness in prayer keeps us centered not on what we need but on the one who meets every need. God gives every good and perfect gift (see James 1:17). We worship Him when we give Him our thanks.

Next, Paul asked the Colossians to pray for him—but he did not ask them to pray for his personal needs. Instead, he asked them to pray for God to open a door so he could share the gospel clearly. He urged them to be prepared to make the most of every opportunity for Christ. “Outsiders” (unbelievers) are everywhere, and those of us who follow Jesus are to live wisely among them. Christians' words should be gracious. Paul also called for “salty” speech. Just as salt brings out food's flavor, so our words should bring out the best in others.

Personal Greetings

Tychicus was Paul's “beloved brother” and “faithful minister.” **Onesimus** was a runaway slave who was returning to his master, Philemon, in Colossae (see the book of Philemon). **Aristarchus** was a travelling companion of Paul's who followed the apostle to Rome (see Acts 20:4). **Mark** wrote the gospel bearing his name. He also deserted Paul on an earlier trip, ending their partnership (see Acts 15:36-40). Yet Paul told the Colossians to welcome Mark if he visited. Paul reminded them of the hard work **Epaphras** had done for them. **Luke** was author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts. He stayed with Paul after he wrote to the Colossians and perhaps even up to his death. According to 2 Timothy 4:10, **Demas**, “in love with this present world,” later deserted Paul. Paul greeted the believers in Laodicea, a city near Colossae. He greeted **Nympha**, probably a wealthy woman since her home was large enough to accommodate a house church. He also exhorted **Archippus** to fulfill the ministry he had received from the Lord.

In his final words, Paul offered a plea: “Remember my chains.” He reminded his readers that his greatest commitment was serving as a minister of the gospel no matter the consequences. Then Paul concluded his letter with his customary closing: “Grace be with you.”



Personalize the TRUTH!

Paul's words to husbands and wives, parents and children, and servants and masters could be summarized as “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). When we willingly yield our rights and preferences, we show love to others and don't feel as if they're taking advantage of us. How could you apply Jesus's example in your own relationships today?