



## Colossians - Chapter 3 v 18 to 4 v 6

## Pray for us

What difference does being a Christian make to how we live? Paul has given good reasons for believing in Jesus and, as he does so often, he then earths it in practical statements about how we should live. These are not separate ideas – belief flows into action. We used to talk about the sacred/secular divide – the good news is that this divide doesn't exist - God wants us to live being guided by what we believe.

Where do you find it difficult to apply what you believe to how you live? You may want to talk about being a Christian in the workplace, in leisure/sporting situations or in the home.

1<sup>st</sup> century Christians were interested in household management because the household was vital to the life of the church. They had affirmed that all believers were equal in Christ so they were forced to deal with questions about the role of women, the place of children and how slaves were to be treated. They also wanted to affirm that Christians were not out to undermine the social order of the day. The household rules in Colossians were supportive of the 1<sup>st</sup> century values of the well-ordered family life.

'Submit' ('Hypotasso') contains no hint of innate inferiority but is used to describe a 'modest cooperative demeanour that puts others first'. It was something expected of all Christians regardless of their rank and gender. (Compare Mark 10:41 to 45, 1 Cor 16:16, Eph 5:21, Phil 2:3 to 4)  
Does that make 'submit' acceptable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Demands are also made of the husband. In many ways their task is more demanding. He reminds husbands of their obligations 'in the Lord'. He is not to exercise his rights over his wife but is commanded to love his wife as a reflection of the love he has received from the Lord. They are told 'not to be harsh with them'.

What does a loving husband who is not harsh look like in a 21<sup>st</sup> century setting? What characteristics of behaviour should result?

When slightly younger my children occasionally reminded me that I must not exasperate them – it usually happened following necessary discipline. If we want our children to be 'disciples' they need 'discipline' (same root word). That discipline can become excessive hence Paul's cautionary word about being heavy handed.

Are there lessons to be learned about how we bring up our children 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'?  
How do we balance discipline with freedom of expression?  
What happens if we overdo either?

Masters and slaves were part of 1<sup>st</sup> century culture. Some were seen as members of the family. Others were not treated well. With 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes we view any kind of slavery as abhorrent. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century it was an entrenched reality that the early Christians could neither change or ignore. Paul does not sanctify slavery but subtly undermines its basic premise.

The centre of Paul's statements is that slaves should work well for their master not just when they're being watched. Also, that masters must treat their slaves with dignity and respect.

Are these principles applicable to 21<sup>st</sup> century employer/employee relationships?

The instructions that come in chapter 4 v 2 to 6 continue Paul's list of directives as to how we should live. They are not separate from the household instructions – they continue that theme. Being devoted to prayer is what many of us struggle with but Paul has two added points – 'be watchful and thankful'. So, we pray and keep watch for our households and be thankful for them.

Is there ever a danger that prayer becomes an isolated activity unconnected to our everyday life and relationships?

Does prayer ever become a long shopping list – does that mean we stop being thankful in our prayers?

Paul is not afraid to ask for prayer (4:3). He is clearly chained up with a guard on each side but he still sees this as a great gospel opportunity. In that situation many of us would be feeling sorry for ourselves – but not Paul. This is a real opportunity. But there's a sting in the tail – 'as I should'. Paul clearly regards any situation as a chance to 'proclaim the mystery of Christ'.

Are we too reluctant to do the same? Could we take more opportunities? Is it something we do because we 'should'?

Continuing in the practical realm, Paul talks about how we treat outsiders. He clearly sees the church as a growing group of people. His point is really, don't do anything that puts people off coming to church. And that's about wise speech (certainly no criticism), taking opportunities (talking to new arrivals before our friends) and gracious conversation with a good flavour (seasoned with salt).

Are we more concerned with renewing friendships rather than making new friends?  
Is there a balance between the two?

## THE DOWNLOAD VERSE

Paul never sees the church as a castle with the drawbridge up and a big no entry sign on the door. Paul sees the church as a constantly expanding company of people. He asks the Colossians to pray for him even though his current situation is dire (chained up in prison)

*'And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should'.  
(4:2 to 4)*

It's only a mystery to those who stubbornly resist. But Paul clearly regards it as something he has to do. It wouldn't have been easy in his day – and it's not in our day. But should we see Download as a growing group or is there a 'no entry' sign on the door

***THANK God for each other and ask God to help us share our faith with others even though it can be costly.***

***And don't forget to pray for one another !!!!!!!***