

Series: Colossians	Reference: <i>Colossians 3:18-4:1</i>	Title: 3 Relationships	Date: 1.31.2021
Website Writeup: Paul takes us on a journey of qualities of true spirituality as seen in 3 significant relationships in life... husbands & wives, parents & children, and slaves & masters (employer & employee). Join us as we explore these qualities together.			

The NIV starts chapter three with the title, *Rules for Holy Living*. But it should read, Qualities of True Spirituality. Paul's been attacking this idea of false religion, this Gnostic, Antinomian, or Ascetic thought on how we attain salvation & become truly spiritual. Attacking the idea, you need something, be it special knowledge, or living by the law, to become truly right with God. He says these ideas indulge self-effort & self-righteousness, that persons religion's of the flesh. He's been showing, by comparison of positive & negative, what spiritual life looks like. Couching all this in the idea, the truly spiritual person sets their sights on Christ alone - everything comes out of a relationship with Jesus. Because of Jesus we have a vertical communal relationship with God, and therefore, now we have a horizontal communal relationship with others. He's showing the Gnostic or Ascetic view puffed one up & with the separation of the material & spiritual, is impractical for everyday relationships. For example, the person living by a moral law or code becomes judgmental & prideful of others. The person thinking the material world doesn't matter can do anything they care to in the body & it doesn't matter, which is hurtful to themselves & others.

As we continue in Colossians, we see Paul's view of the spiritual life focused on Christ becomes intensely practical in personal relationships. He addresses three relationships we all have to deal with, *marital, parental & vocational*. We've seen great societal changes in thinking & practice by way of the Gospel when Paul said to us just a few verses before, *11Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all*. And something similar in Galatians 3:26-29, *26You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*.

The Gospel's the great *equalizer*. No one person's more important than another. The Gospel's given women their rightful place as coequal with men. Given the slave their rightful place as coequal with master. Children are seen as participatory. Paul's also not asking for all societal norms to be changed or challenged either. He's focusing on our hearts & minds in regards to Jesus. How will we react or act in the various situations we find ourselves in, is the question. He realizes, the Colossians live in a society where issues like slavery can't be tackled in the larger society all at once, but as Christians, slaves & masters are to obey their ultimate Master which plays out in their relationship together & ultimately undermines the institution of slavery.

We're equal in Jesus. Therefore, what governs our relationships? He begins with the marital relationship, *18Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19Husbands, love your wives & do not be harsh with them.* The 'S' word, will Jason say it?! I've heard others preach on passages such as this & felt they miss the point. It's not that their words were all wrong, but attitudes were off. Let me explain. If I don't believe women are equal with men, meaning they're as intelligent, sophisticated, gifted, creative, etc., then my preaching's misogynistic. But, if I see myself as equal with my wife, as Scripture teaches, then my take on this passage is going to be out of a heart of grace, love, respect & encouragement, a servant's heart towards her.

The word *submission* has been used to subjugate. Coming out in very subtle ways, a look, a pat on the back, "*Don't you worry your pretty little head about it sweetheart.*" It's meant their whole being is in subjugation to the man. Husbandly love has been taken to mean the man's condescending care of the woman.¹ Some have used verses like these to abuse women, gotten away with it, or even been applauded for being a directive husband.

Let's think on what Paul's saying as he speaks into a highly patriarchal society where all privilege was to the man & all duty to the woman. In the Christian family, the Gospel transforms relationships as we focus on Jesus as our model. Marriage becomes a partnership. As we set our hearts & minds on Him, then the family, the most intimate of relationships we have, becomes the proving ground of true spirituality. What happens in the home validates what happens in the heart before God². Remember, Paul's writing in a world which devalued women, children & slaves. These three groups were expected to obey, nothing else. What he's calling for is a change in thinking towards these 3 groups. An uplifting in comparison to the surrounding culture. That Christian marriage is where both find mutual encouragement, completeness & joy as they seek Christ together. It's radical in context. He calls for repentance of societal norms surrounding them. Saying, change in how we view & treat each other comes from the heart & mind focused on Jesus as Master.

So, the wife's misguided if she views herself as subservient to a man, allowing him to devalue & beat her up verbally or physically – that was hopeful & women came to Christ in droves in early Christianity as a result! But over time some women have been advised to stay in abusive situations due to this idea of 'submissiveness'. I wouldn't agree. Every situation is different & unique, requiring wise counsel. But, in light of your identity in Christ, it very well may be more glorifying to God, and a witness to an abusive spouse, to separate, if not just for a time. Your value as a woman is because of Christ, not contingent on any man. God places value on you as a created loved child, grafted into his family. Jack Miller, the pastor & author of *Sonship*, used to say to his wife, "*Rose Marie, you act as if you're an orphan, but God's your father.*" All women should see that & rejoice, they're valued & loved as whole persons in Jesus, no man can take that away.

¹ Wall, Robert W. IVP New Testament Commentary vol. 12, Colossians & Philemon

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Viewing herself this way, submission to her husband's following the model of her Lord as He submitted Himself to God. When that happens in a Christian family, it results in the elevation of the woman in the Christian home & an end to abuse. A witness to this misogynistic world we live in³. The issue isn't focused on gender, but how each of us *orients ourselves to Christ* & how it plays out in relationship. Secular interpretations of submission & love have to be thrown out – they don't apply. We mark everything towards Jesus who submitted Himself to God & loved the church by sacrifice for her, elevating her status & place. Kim's not inferior to me any more than Jesus is inferior to God.

Both the relationship of wife to husband & husband to wife are governed, not by some societal norm or expectation, rather by Christ, the Living Word, and model to all. *Christ is all & is in all*. He's in me just as much as He's in her. In the greater context, we have to react to each other with compassion, gentility, humility, kindness & patience. I have no right as a husband to subjugate, control, belittle, hold back, or play down my wife. Whether we talk about a wife's submission, or a husband loving, both of those are coming out of the new life in Christ & in contrast to those old self practices of the past that this patriarchal society of 1st century Rome espoused.

In Christ there are no favorites as the passage tells us. He's for husband & wife in equal measure. As husband, my first concern for her is, she's driven towards & fulfilled in Christ, given opportunity as much as it's within my power to find her calling in Jesus & make that realized. That's fitting in the Lord.

So, men when looking for a mentor/discipleship relationship, especially with an older married man, look for the man whose wife's fulfilled. Look for the man who loves, builds her up, listens to her advice, seeks her wisdom & engages with her. Look for the man who submits to her in love, as Ephesians 5:21 says, *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. The man on equal footing with his wife & has his wife's respect, because you can't have respect without love, only fear. Look for the man whose wife willingly submits to him since she's fulfilled, loved, cared for & growing to her full potential in a loving relationship with a Christ-like man.

Avoid the man whose wife you never hear about or see, who belittles his wife or women, whose wife stares at the ground in group conversation, or who's never pushed his wife to blossom in her gifting & ambitions. Although these men may have a form of godliness, their relationship is most likely reflecting their heart toward God. You'll learn nothing but the law from that guy.

Now Paul moves to the parental relationship...*20Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord*. Allow me to tell you a story: *A father passing by his son's bedroom was astonished to see his bed nicely made & everything picked up. Then he saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow that was addressed to*

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'Dad. With the worst premonition he opened the envelope with trembling hands & read the letter.

Dear Dad,

It's with great regret & sorrow I write. I eloped with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with mom & you. I've been finding real passion with Stacy, she's so nice. But I knew you'd not approve of her because of all her piercing, tattoos, tight clothing & the fact that she's much older than I. But it's not only the passion...Dad she's pregnant. Stacy said we'll be very happy.

She owns a trailer in the woods & has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many more children. Stacy's opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone. We'll be growing it for ourselves & trading it with the other people who live nearby for cocaine & ecstasy. In the meantime, we'll pray science will find a cure for AIDS so Stacy can get better. She deserves it. Don't worry Dad. I'm 15 & I know how to take care of myself. Someday I'm sure we'll be back to visit so you can get to know your grandchildren...

Love,

Your Son John & Stacy

P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I'm over at Tommy's. I just wanted to remind you there are worse things in life than a report card that's in my center desk drawer. I love you. Call me when it's safe to come home.

The parent/child relationship's difficult. There's a verb change here from submission which only sometimes means obedience to the more explicit word for obedience in the Greek. There's also a change of verbal voice from the middle, which implies the wife's submission is voluntary (*not forced*), to an active imperative, which implies the child's unquestioning obedience⁴. Notice how he says *'in everything'*. So, children are *not* off the hook. Scripture doesn't treat them like idiots. It calls children into an intelligent & vibrant relationship with Jesus & doesn't allow them the wiggle room for excuses. We can't let the surrounding culture become the arguing point for what we want to do. Our standard's Jesus, just like our mother & fathers. We're called to obedience in our family by Jesus, not by parents.

Unfortunately we consider children to have little to no voice while they're smart, intelligent, gifted, creative human beings with a lot to say. Parents should listen, weighing a child's words carefully, listening to the thoughts of your heart (*Aidan, used to sit in & contribute in our church plant meetings*). However, in the position as dependent children, it's good to remember parents have walked these roads. A loving, wise parent can see the pitfalls well beforehand, but they're not God. They can be wrong & that's why both need to seek a balance in relationship. But the preference for final decision making falls to the parent as long as the child's in their care.

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Although kids should be heard, they obey even if they disagree, since it shows their heart for Christ. Obeying, knowing it's the parent who's been weighted with the responsibility of their growth, development & safety. It's not going to be forever, they'll be in that position one day with similar responsibilities. However, I'm not advocating obedience in sinful areas. Some of my friends' parents in High School smoked pot with their kids. That isn't an area a child needs to obey a parent in. If parents view sexuality as a free thing & would allow a child to sleep with their boyfriend or girlfriend, that wouldn't be an area they need to obey. Jesus is the person they're ultimately obeying in the context of this relationship & they can also be a witness to a fallen parent.

Paul also has something to say to the parent, *21Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged*. So, although the child/parent relationship is different from the marital relationship in the idea of obedience, the father's direction should come also out of a heart & mindset of Christ. This relationship should emulate the virtues Paul's listed for us.

Many people, have a hard time praying 'Our Father', since it comes with images of severity, neglect, or abuse. It comes for some with the idea you can never please. Anytime you give a command to obey someone you're setting up potential for abuse. There has been child abuse in many forms, the most common being neglect. There's emotional neglect where things aren't said which should be. Or, time not spent with a child which should be. If obedience is demanded without love, damage is done. If love's dependent on obedience, damage is done. If punishments are harsh & done out of anger instead of heart to love that child, damage is done. What's the result? A child who both secretly or openly drifts into self-destructive behavior & ultimately away from the faith, since it's viewed as having failed them. Pink Floyd's album, *The Wall*, outlines how an abusive & neglecting parent helps a child to build a wall.

Parents, the fear's palpable concerning your children's drift from faith. But to operate out of fear & not faith, the end result is a hedge of law & rules which do nothing but harm & shelter that child, driving them farther from you & Jesus. Instead, entrust them to Jesus, a loved & encouraged child doesn't easily drift, or secretly hate. A fulfilled child doesn't seek fulfillment elsewhere. A loved & trusted child's an obedient child. However, this is an issue of a person's heart & we know the heart's deceitful above all things. Sometimes, no matter your best efforts, they still drift – but where they go when they fall depends on how you love them now (*my parents*). Stop sheltering & controlling, start loving.

Paul may be directing this comment at fathers more than mothers, since in a patriarchal society, more damage's done by an unloving distant & harsh father than a mother. However, it applies to mothers as well. In Christ, rather than the relationship being defined as the father having *power over* the child, it's defined as the father becoming the *servant of* (power under) his children as Christ served & died for the Church⁵.

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Paul continues to our third grouping, vocational relationships....²²*Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you & to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart & reverence for the Lord.* ²³*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,* ²⁴*since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.* ²⁵*Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.* ¹*Masters, provide your slaves with what is right & fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*

We have to clarify slavery as seen in our recent history isn't the same as we see it in Scripture. Although there are similarities, the worlds were different. But I'd say God has always been moving His people away from this institution. Slavery in the 1st century existed, but wasn't common. It became more common in the Roman Empire for reasons of commerce & economic sustainability. There were a number of ways a person became a slave. Through capture in war. By birth to slave parents. Or by purchase...a convict may be sold as a slave to recover lost money, a debtor may be sold, along with family members to pay off the debt, a person may also sell themselves to avoid poverty, and some slaves even had their own slaves.

Some slaves filled important staff positions & did business for their masters, They were entrusted with a lot. The Ethiopian Eunuch was most likely a slave in another land on a business trip for his master. A high percentage of teachers, doctors & professionals were slaves. Scripture acknowledges slavery existed & speaks to our relationships in that context⁶. Once the Gospel made clear what was true all along, slaves are their masters' equal, it unraveled the institution. In addition, it made a safe societal shift for them instead of all out rebellion where blood would be spilt or poverty would ensue.

Furthermore, according to *1 Co. 6:19-20*, we're slaves, bought with a price & Jesus has a right to our allegiance. We've been brought over from being slaves to sin to slaves to righteousness. Paul takes great pride in other passages in calling himself a slave to Jesus (*Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:1*)

So, although there were horrible atrocities meted out on slaves in the NT times, we can more likely look on this passage as one of employment (*pembantus in Indonesia*). And, Paul brings up the same argument he does in the other two relationships (marital, parental) with the vocational relationship. And, the question before us as employees or employers is, who is it you ultimately serve? Paul's convinced, if we set our hearts & minds on Christ as employees, then we'll see our work as a spiritual act of worship & it'll not matter if your boss is a jerk or not. So the question is, what's our motivation to work well? Is it that we want to please our boss & have a satisfying working relationship, or that we get as much financial gain as possible? Or, is it that we see work as serving Christ? And, concerning financial gain, Paul's reminding us of the promise, if we serve Christ well by working well, then there are both present & future blessings.

⁶ *Revell Bible Dictionary*, Fleming H. Revell Company. Old Tappan, NJ. 1990, 'Slaves'

This last point is important since slaves weren't paid much, if at all. What reward do we hope for? In talking about slavery, working for Jesus & future rewards '*James Hal Cone, an important African-American theologian, has said that black spirituals celebrated visions of heavenly reward to affirm what it means to be fully human in an earthly context where love, justice & liberation were rarely realized. From the gospel stories the slaves knew about God's love & justice; they spoke of their heavenly home as the place where they'd finally & fully experience these truths. To mind the "things above" is to hope for an inheritance that reverses socioeconomic conditions on earth, where many people are oppressed & denied humanity. Significantly, the spiritual songs of American slaves were mostly composed in the fields of hard labor rather than in the churches of earnest worship. They expressed the real reason slaves continued to work well in spite of terrible treatment: they minded the One above in the confident hope that he realized their true value & would one day give them back their humanity. In this limited but profound sense, they shared a rich koinonia with their Christian counterparts in ancient Colosse.*'

Likewise, the master's not left to his own. He's a slave to righteousness himself. He's also been bought with a price. His treatment of others is directly linked to obedience to his Master. If he's obeying Jesus then his treatment of slaves/employees is going to be fair & good, honoring them as fellow & equal creatures of God.

The Gospel brings equality to community. Everyone has equal value in the eyes of Jesus. So, how are our relationships governed, and by whom? Our relationships are governed not by our situation, our feelings towards someone, by societal norms or expectations, but out of a focus on Jesus as Master. We love & build others up. Listen & obey when we must. Treat others with respect & courtesy. Serve & care for others. We lead our children out of a heart for them to know Jesus. We work as if it were worship to the Lord. Imagine our witness to the world if our families & work relationships were marked by these virtues out of a focus on Jesus. Imagine how that would change the world.

⁷ Wall