

Serving Christ in the family and at work
Colossians 3:18-4:1
Bruce Miller

Today I'm going to share a bit about my marriage, my family and my jobs. The Church of Jesus Christ has serious problems in all three areas. There are too many Christian messed up marriages; too many Christian fouled up families and too many work places with weak Christian workers. We are hurting the cause of Christ with our divorces and unhappy marriages. We are making Christ look bad with our messed up families. We are damaging Christ's reputation with our poor work habits. It's sad when a person says that do not want to hire a Christian or work for a Christian when the reason is not their faith, but their inadequate work or unfair supervision. Paul speaks to unjust Christian bosses; lazy workers; disobedient children; abusive dads, harsh husbands and controlling wives.

We are in a series called Experiencing Christ, a journey through Colossians. In our passage today Paul moves from the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in the universe to the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in our daily lives. We have died with Christ, risen with Christ and now our lives are Christ's. So given that reality, how do we live for Christ in our marriages, families and jobs? There are no more difficult places to serve Christ than in the privacy of our homes and in the pressure of our jobs.

But this Book has the answers! Open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 18. Paul shares with us how we can have rich marriages, families and jobs. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. The whole issue boils down to one word, one title, that appears seven times, referring to one person. Colossians 3, verse 18.

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. ²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and 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 and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

The passage is clearly structured in three pairs with mutual responsibilities for each party. Notice the order: marriage, family, work, with the most important context first. Notice the order of who is always addressed first, the weaker, more vulnerable of the two. Special concern is shown for the ones under authority. Notice wives, children and slaves are addressed equally with their husbands, fathers and masters. They are ethically responsible partners who are expected to do “what is fitting in the Lord” just as the husband, the father and the master.

What is Paul’s main point in this text? Go back and circle or underline every use of the word, “Lord.” Let me list them for you.

fitting in the Lord 18
for this pleases the Lord 20
reverence for the Lord 22
for the Lord 23
from the Lord 24
It is the Lord Christ you are serving 24
you also have a Master [Lord] in heaven 4:1

The seven-fold reference to the Lord Jesus Christ is the key to this passage. Paul introduces a new purpose into our personal lives. The main purpose for working to have good marriages, families and jobs is not to be happy and fulfilled, but to please the Lord. Remember the whole book of Colossians is about Christ, telling us that our whole lives should be about Christ. The Lord should invariably be our point of reference as a spouse, parent and worker.

The key phrase to unlock the passage is in verse 24:

it is the Lord Christ you are serving. All life is in the Lord and for the Lord. Christianity introduces a new purpose, presence, power and pattern into our personal lives. Jesus Christ is the motivation, the strength and the model for our lives. But you do not have Christ in your life until you trust in Him as your Savior. Let’s walk through the passage asking God to shape us in these three spheres of life. Most of us have arenas where we are in authority and relationships where we are under authority. Paul starts with marriage.

Many husbands and wives act as if their goal is conquest of the other by blustering or manipulating. It is a battle for power. Loud threats, domestic blackmail and crushing words don't make for "happily ever after."

I told you I would share about my marriage. This year is huge for me because this year my oldest son is 22. So what? I got married two weeks after I turned 22. I now have a son as old as I was when I got married. What was I thinking getting married so young?!

When we were first married, my wife Tamara was a door mat. During our premarital counseling with our pastor, we took a Taylor Johnson personality test. Tamara scored as submissive as you could get. I scored as dominate as you could get. He warned us we would have problems. We did. However, a few years into our marriage, a crisis and a season of counseling changed things. Now Tamara is anything but a door mat; she is her own person in the full and best sense of that phrase. Sometimes when she pushes back on my ideas, I tease her and ask, "where is my old doormat?" But seriously, our marriage is so much healthier now. In fact we are more in love than ever and would not trade our marriage for any one else's in the world.

What does Paul say?

Marriage – "*fitting in the Lord*"

Paul speaks first to wives. He says, ¹⁸ *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* To many today this sounds out of date or worse outlandish, embarrassing in an egalitarian world of equal rights for all. Let's tackle it. A few powerful observations: Paul speaks to wives, not to women in general. Women who are single, widowed or divorced head their own household. Second, wives are to submit to their own husbands, not to all men.

What does "submission" mean? We need a new word because the word "submission" has been so abused. Often in modern English it is a negative or demeaning word. So what does Paul mean when he uses the Greek word, *hypotasso*?

Wives: appropriately defer

Submission means to appropriately defer to one in authority over you. It is recognition of another's God-given position of authority. It is to arrange your life under proper authority.

It does not mean wives are inferior. *Hypotasso* in no way implies that one party is lesser than the other. Submission has nothing to do with ability. A wife may have a higher IQ as in my marriage; Tamara is smarter than I am. A wife may earn more money than her husband. A wife may be better at repairing the home, as in my marriage. A husband may be a better cook, as is not the case in my marriage. *Hypotasso* does not imply that a wife or husband carry out certain duties such as cooking.

Hypotasso never means that a wife should suffer abuse quietly. We must not allow this text to be misused to apply pressure on wives to put up with husbands who abuse them verbally, emotionally or physically. Abusers need treatment. Wives need protection. If you are being abused or are an abuser, let us know so we can help you.

Hypotasso is not obedience required of a child or a servant. Paul usually gets blamed for saying, “obey your husband”; many brides don’t want it in their marriage ceremony, but the Bible never says that. The word for “submission” of wives is different from the word for children to “obey” their parents. And its form is different.

The form of the verb *submit* is middle voice which communicates voluntary chosen action, not compulsory reaction. It is something a person does to themselves. Husbands are never told to subordinate their wives.

So what does “submission” mean as Paul uses it? It is a term of order or authority. It means to appropriately defer to one in authority. Husbands and wives are equal partners in marriage with different functions to fulfill. Wives should defer the way the Son of God defers or submits to God the Father. They are equally God in power, dignity and rights, but assume different roles in the operation of the Godhead. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:3 “*Now I want you to realize that the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*” The Son dies on the cross not the Father. He voluntarily yielded to the Father In His intense garden prayer right before He was arrested, He cried out, “*not my will but yours be done*” So husbands and wives are

- * Equal in personhood, distinct in position
- * Equal in dignity, different in duties
- * Equal in worth, unique in work
- * Equal in rights, different in responsibilities

Wives defer to your husbands as is fitting to Christ. It is your allegiance to Jesus that motivates and guides your yielding. Never follow your husband against Christ. Wives, let's be honest, one part of you resists your husband's leadership. You need the power of Christ to defer to his God-given authority. Some of you reject the idea all together. If you will follow God's plan for marriage you will not only honor the Lord, but you will have a better marriage. God created marriage. He knows how it should work.

Now wife's deferring is not mentioned alone, but in conjunction with the responsibilities of her husband. Husbands, I hear from many wives, "I wish my husband would lead. I'm praying for him to lead." What is Paul's charge?

Husbands: love and do not be harsh

¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*

Notice husbands are not commanded to subordinate their wives, but to love their wives, with the extra warning, not to be harsh. We lead by loving. Yet, too often we don't lead, partially because our culture has emasculated men into passivity. It is easier just to let your wife lead.

Husbands, we are not to submit to our wives, we have a higher obligation. We are to lovingly sacrifice for them. Christ died for the church. The church did not die for Christ. Philippians chapter 2 offers the best description of Christ's sacrificial love that we are to imitate.

⁶ *Who, being in very nature^a God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature^b of a servant, being made in human likeness.* Philippians 2:6-7. Although we have the authority of being the head, we are not to grasp on to that authority, but to go of our rights for our wife. Some of us say we will take a bullet for our wives, but will we take out the trash? Christlike love is a high calling to devoted and sacrificial care for your wife's entire well-being.

The more you love your wife sacrificially the easier it is for her to follow you. The Bible warns, *do not be harsh with your wife*. That's a man's temptation. In a burst of temper with a few loud words you can crush your

^a Or in the form of

^b Or the form

wife. Don't excuse your sin by your spouse's sin. Christ loved those who were crucifying Him. You must love your wife even when she makes you really mad.

It frustrates me to hear observations that more women attend church than men; that more women pray or go to Bible studies or serve or share their faith. Men, get out of the LazyBoy and stand up for Christ. Men, stand up. Right now, stand up. God called you to lead. I challenge you to step up and lead: if you are married, lovingly lead your wives to follow Christ. If you have kids, lead them to follow Christ. Set the atmosphere of your home. Young men, stand up in your schools. Be men, the men God created you to be. Lead the way forward in dedicated service to Jesus Christ.

God wants us to have the best marriages ever because those will be fitting to the Lord and please Him. Get your marriage together for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wives appropriately defer and husbands lovingly lead without being harsh.

From marriage, Paul moves the second arena, family, parenting.

Family – “*pleases the Lord*”

I told you I would tell you about my kids. Nine months and ten days after we were married, our first son was born. On his due date I might add, for those of you who were wondering. Shame on you. Six and a half years later we had five children, no twins. Some of you are staggered at the thought of five little biddy ones. Others of you have realized that when the oldest was 19, the youngest was 13, five teenagers at one time. Today my oldest is 22 and the youngest is 16. Although we have made many mistakes, we have aimed to follow the Bible's advice.

We strive to raise a family that pleases the Lord. The Bible speaks first to children and then directly to fathers.

Children: obey

²⁰ *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

In this context Paul is talking about children in the home, not about adult children, who still should honor their parents, but no longer need to obey them. What does it really mean to obey? I have a little formula I've shared before and it has been requested that I share it again because it was so helpful to many parents. ICE obedience. Children, you want to give your

parents ICE obedience. By the way this applies to whoever is raising you whether it is your biological parents, step parents, adopted parents, foster parents or any other adult who is raising you. ICE. The I stands for

Immediately

Obey the first time. Delayed obedience is disobedience. When you're sitting on the couch and your mom walks in the room saying, "get up and go put away your clothes," and you say, "sure," without moving from the couch, you may experience a reaction from your mother. Her first thought is that you have a hearing problem, so she says in a louder voice, "I said, get up off that couch right now and pick up your clothes. Did you not hear me?" Tip: it will do you no good to point out that that is not exactly what she said the first time. The best advice is to get up and do it, otherwise, what comes next is not pretty. Over time many moms get lots of practice in counting. "Come here right this minute, I'm counting, 1...2....3I'm still counting . . . 4, 5, 6." I wonder what's the highest number any mom has ever gone to. True obedience is immediate. Delayed obedience is disobedience. ICE obedience is obeying immediately and C

Completely

When mom says, "clean the table," that does not mean leave crumbs; mow the yard, not just the easy parts; put your clothes in your drawers, not just in a basket in your room. Put your dishes not just in the sink, but in the dishwasher. Finish the job. Partial obedience is disobedience. ICE obedience is to obey immediately, completely and E

Enthusiastically

When dad says, take out the trash, he does not want to hear: "it's not my job; how come you asked me and not her; why do I have to do it; it's not my trash; I always have to do it; ask someone else; I'm in a hurry; I don't have time; I hate to do that job, give me another one." Even after all that fussing if you still do take out the trash, you still have not done ICE obedience because grudging obedience is disobedience. Dad wants to hear, "sure, dad I'd love to take out the trash and after what else could I do for you." Mom and dad want ICE obedience: to obey immediately, completely and enthusiastically. If you are still living at home, try ICE obedience today; I just bet your mom and dad will appreciate it. The Bible not only speaks to children, but to parents as well, addressing fathers in particular as the heads of the family.

Fathers: do not exasperate or you will dishearten

²¹ *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.* To “embitter” means to provoke, irritate or exasperate. The danger of doing this is that we will dishearten our kids. They will lose heart and lack spirit. Dads, we can crush our kids.

How do we exasperate our kids? Ask them. I meet periodically with two men outside our church who challenge me spiritually. The last time we were together one of them challenged me to give each of my kids a form to evaluate me as a dad. That’s a scary thought. Performance reviews are scary enough at work, but is not your family more important to you than your job. Is not being a good dad more valuable than being a good employee. Try it. Ask your kids how you are doing. I’ll put the assessment I gave to my kids on our web site, but just try asking them: what am I doing well and where could I improve as a dad?

Here are a few ways we exasperate our kids.

- We are inconsistent. One minute we give strict rules and harsh discipline then we just let go and let them do what they want.
- We are perfectionists. Nothing they do is ever good enough. In an effort to motivate them, we tear them down. The 89 was not good enough; second place is failure.
- We neglect them. We fail to show them attention and affection verbally and physically. One study from several years ago said that the average dad spends 37 seconds per day with his child.
- We hurt them. In our anger, we over-discipline. Some go so far as to abuse, verbally or physically.

Dads, reread Colossians chapter 3. Put off anger, rage, filthy language and put on compassion, kindness, patience, forgiveness, so that your home will be a place of peace and love, pleasing to Christ.

From marriage and family, Paul moves to the third arena, the work place. I told you I would tell you about my jobs. My first job was throwing a paper route which I did for years. I worked in the produce department of a grocery store, worked for my dad in his dental office, landscaped for a summer, the hottest summer on record 1980, decided against that career. Worked for the University of Texas’ business services, then developed and ran my own business, Professional Tutoring. I have been a Professor, a writer, a director of a parachurch ministry, an associate pastor and now a senior pastor. Like many of you, I have been hired and fired, and I have hired and fired. I’ve been misjudged, underpaid, overworked and unworked, had clients not pay;

sweated, been bored, been tempted to cut corners and wrestled God over how to care well for those under my authority. In the work place, the Bible says,

Work place – “*It is the Lord Christ you are serving*”

Jesus does not overturn the social structures of His day, but shows us how to live in whatever cultural framework we find ourselves. In His time what Paul wrote was revolutionary. Slaves are addressed first as equal in personhood and responsibility with masters. Clearly they are members of the congregation with equal standing before Christ. In chapter 3 verse 11 Paul just said in Christ there is no slave or free.

How can what Paul says speak to us today? The bridge to our world is that most of us are under authority and some of us have authority over others in a work place environment. To those under authority

Under authority: work sincerely with all your heart

When we are under another human’s authority you are to work, *, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.* ²³

The phrase when their eye is on you could mean only giving external work, not really doing it from your heart; or only working hard when your supervisor is watching or even only doing work to attract the bosses’ attention and praise. In any case, the opposite is to work sincerely with all your heart for the Lord. Notice again the Lord is the key. Ultimately you are not working for your human boss, but for the Lord.

How do we mess up as employees? We do shoddy work. We avoid the unpleasant work and try to get others to do it. We are negligent. We show up late and leave early. We do as little work as possible. Dilbert is our picture of the work place so it is also our excuse for goofing off. Instead the Bible says in verse 23, ²³ *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*

We should be the best workers. Turn your job into an act of worship. Work not for your boss or the company, but for the Lord. One day God is going to reward us. All injustice will one day be addressed before the divine court.

You may be being unjustly treated today, but remember, *It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*²⁵ *Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.* Here is the main point of the whole passage. In marriage, in the family and at work we are serving the Lord Christ. *It is the Lord Christ you are serving.* He is our purpose, our power and our pattern. Live for Christ alone. This applies to those under authority as well as those in authority. The Bible says

In authority: be just and fair

¹ *Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*

Most advice to business owners of that day was on how to get the most out of your slaves often through beating them. Today those in authority can have the same attitude. Human resources is a noble profession, but we must not consider people as simply another resource like square footage or equipment. Fixating on the bottom line can cause us to cross the line, morally. Those in authority over others should be about more than just how much productivity you can get out of your employees. In revolutionary language for His day, Paul said masters are to do what is right and fair. The word *right* can mean just. The word *fair* also means equality. To use these words in regard to slaves was extraordinary. If you are in authority look for how to preserve people's dignity. Are you being fair and just? Are you treating people with respect not as disposable resources? Recent headlines highlight abuses such as at Enron and other companies where those in authority took advantage of those under them.

What is your motivation for acting justly and fairly? You too have a Master in heaven. The word for Master is the word for "Lord" referring to Christ and related to the word used for the human "master." Realize you must answer to God for how you handle those under your authority. One day He will do our final performance review. How will He evaluate how you handled the people in your authority?

The main point of this passage is to live our daily lives in service to Christ. I encourage you to talk through these issues in your Life Group. Encourage and challenge each other to serve Christ in our marriages, families and jobs. Students, I urge you to get deeply involved in Merge and Fuel our Middle school and High School ministries. Husband and wives, if your marriage is in serious trouble, get help.

Imagine what would happen if we all took this passage seriously. Imagine non divorce rate in our church. Imagine home where the neighbors kids loved to come because there is no yelling and tension. Imagine people lining up to hire McKinney Fellowship members because we are such good employees. Imagine people standing in line to work for our companies because we are so just and fair. What would our marriages, families and work places look like if we really lived for Christ in each arena? in our marriages with wives deferring and husbands loving without being harsh? in our families, with children obeying and fathers not exasperating? in our jobs with those under authority working with all their hearts and those in authority being just and fair? People would be astonished at how different we are.

Why would we do this? For the Lord Christ, who is the theme of the passage, the theme of the book, and should be the theme of our lives.

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