

ROMANCING THE SAINTS AT COLOSSAE

Studies in the Book of Colossians

*“If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the ‘church of Christ,’
then Colossians must surely be labeled ‘the Christ of the church’”
unknown*

Text

Colossians 3:18 - 4:1

Topic

The apostle Paul discusses the roles and relationships in your home
in terms of your submission to Jesus Christ

Title

“Better Homes & Graces”

Introduction

We are at a Joshua moment.

Allow me to elaborate.

A common talking point among Christians is the breakdown of the American family. When we mention the breakdown of the American family, however, we rarely mean the Christian family. **But it is precisely the Christian family we ought to be most concerned about.**

Take marriage and divorce as an example. Among all adults who have been married, a Barna survey¹ discovered that one-third (33%) have experienced at least one divorce.

¹ <http://barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released>

Among the population segments with the lowest likelihood of having been divorced subsequent to marriage are evangelicals (26%) and Catholics (28%).

Born again Christians who do not consider themselves evangelical were indistinguishable from the national average on the matter of divorce: 33% have been married and divorced.²

We are considered evangelicals. *We're better than everybody else!* But not by much and, really, the figures are appalling.

Let's go inside the Christian home. In another survey Barna discovered that the most widely purchased media by Christian parents in the year 2007 were DVDs of movies and TV programs. More than three out of four Christian parents (78%) had purchased such disks for their teenagers and almost nine out of ten Christian parents (87%) had purchased DVDs for their children under 13. However, more than one-quarter of those believing parents (26%) did not feel comfortable with the DVD products they purchased.³

The researchers concluded,

Many Christian parents are striving to serve two conflicting masters: society and God. They refuse to believe that they cannot satisfy both.⁴

² "Born again Christians" are defined as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents are not asked to describe themselves as "born again."

"Evangelicals" meet the born again criteria (described above) plus seven other conditions. Those include saying their faith is very important in their life today; believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; believing that Satan exists; believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today. Being classified as an evangelical is not dependent upon church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church attended. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as "evangelical."

³ <http://barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/90-christian-parents-are-not-comfortable-with-media-but-buy-them-for-their-kids-anyway>

⁴ Ibid.

It's a Joshua moment. You remember him. He was the man who led the nation of Israel to victory after victory in their conquest of the Promised Land.

It wasn't the morals of the surrounding pagan culture that concerned him. It was the low spiritual condition of his fellow Hebrews. Faced with the breakdown of family values among the people of God, Joshua boldly declared, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Our verses in Colossians deal with the home life of believers. They will help us to be able to adapt Joshua's famous declaration for ourselves.

I'll organize my thoughts around two declarations: #1 As For Me, In My House I Will Serve The Lord, and #2 As For Me, On My Job I Will Serve The Lord.

#1 As For Me, In My House
I Will Serve The Lord
(3:18-21)

It's best we begin by revealing the 'secret' to the happy Christian home. **It is to embrace your role in the home by submitting to Jesus.**

Every relationship mentioned in these verses is discussed in terms of our relationship to the Lord by phrases like "as is fitting in the Lord" (v18), "this is well pleasing to the Lord" (v22), and "as to the Lord" (v23). He is there, in my home, asking me to fulfill my role as an act of obedience to Him, in submission to Him. And with the asking He provides me the enabling to accomplish it.

When I start talking to wives it's human nature for them to think about the failings of their husbands. When I start talking to husbands it's human nature for them to think about the failings of their wives. The same is true when talking to parents about their children and vice-versa.

Instead we are to think about the Lord. Whatever I do, I am to do it for Him - *not* for myself or for the other members of my family.

I ‘husband’ or ‘wife’ or ‘parent’ as to the Lord, to be well pleasing to Him, and no one else. I submit myself to Him.

The word “submit” carries a negative connotation. *It shouldn’t!* Submission is a most beautiful spiritual quality. Because of it, *you are saved!* Think for a moment about the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By definition the three Persons of the Godhead are co-equal. None is superior or inferior to another.

In order to save lost mankind each of the three Persons assumed a role with responsibilities. Thus we say that the Father sent the Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus subordinated Himself to the Father. He submitted to the Father for the sake of the plan of salvation. Now Jesus sends the Holy Spirit - who has subordinated Himself to Jesus.

If your goal is to be like Jesus and to reveal Him to others, you’re going to need to learn submission and practice it. You learn it at home.

As we look at each of the individual roles in the family, keep in mind they all require submission to the Lord.

Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

The word itself would be the same word used to describe relationships in the military. It means *to be in order under*. We understand the military here in our county. People join the military and, once enlisted, they have put themselves under its order of rankings. They learn and perform their roles and responsibilities. If I may say so, it’s an awesome thing to see the military in action when everyone is in order under their proper command.

Ladies, when you marry you are voluntarily putting yourself under the authority of “your own husband.” Why? It “is fitting in the Lord.” That means it has been God’s plan from the beginning. It befits a woman to be subordinate to her husband.

It was God’s plan both before and after Adam and Eve sinned. Adam was created first, then Eve. He was to be her head; she was to be his helper.

After they sinned the roles remained the same. It's the way the home was designed by God.

Whenever the word "submit" is used I think people tend to hear words like "inferior." The woman is *not* inferior to the man; the man is *not* superior to the woman. It's a matter of assuming your proper roles in the home.

I shouldn't have to tell you that you are not required by God to submit to sinful behavior. Submission doesn't mean it's OK to be physically abused.

It does mean that you are called upon to help your Christian husband. It does mean you are to look beyond him and his failings to your Lord and do what pleases Jesus.

Bottom line: The Christian home was designed by God to have a husband as the head and a wife as his helper. When things aren't sinful but still not going smoothly, ladies you are to look past your earthly head to the Lord and do what pleases Him. What pleases Him is to have an attitude of submission. He's there in your home and He will enable you.

Colossians 3:19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

You may not see the word 'submit' here but it is more than implied. Jesus commands husbands to love their wives. It's an order.

The "love" commanded here is to be continuous and at all times and in all situations. Here are words that describe the kind of "love" that is being commanded: sacrificial, giving, holy, redemptive, nourishing, cherishing, forgiving, cleansing, and sanctifying. Love has nothing to do with whether or not your wife is submitting to you. You look past her to the Lord and love her this way for Him.

Jesus did it for you! While we were yet sinners He died for us. He looked past us to His Father. He did it as a man, not as God. He did it by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. So can we.

“Do not be bitter toward them.” Where did that come from? It must be the reaction a husband has when he is looking for love that is reciprocal. In other words, I love you and when you love me back everything is sweet. But when you don’t love me back, I’m going to resent it and grow bitter.

I am so glad God isn’t ever bitter toward me! After all, He loves me perfectly, but I tend to leave my first love for Him. He goes on loving me and it is that love that moves me to repent, to return, to be restored.

You should be beginning to understand that marriage isn’t 50-50 or even each of you giving 100% or 110%. It is you looking past your spouse to the Lord. It is you living to please Jesus and availing yourself of His power, His enablement, to do so.

Just when you think you might have some of this figured out, kids come along and for the next several decades you’ve got them to deal with.

Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

The “children” in this situation are young children, not yet legal adults or married.

The word “obey” can be translated, *to hearken at the door*. It describes a knock at your door that causes you to stop what you’re doing and go open it.

Children are to obey your parents “in all things.” Everything. Their friends, their music, their interests. Everything.

This presupposes that you are evangelizing your kids. You are introducing them to the Lord and to the things of the Lord. Get them saved from the youngest possible age. Salvation is job one for you as a Christian parent.

I’m getting ahead of myself. We’re still talking about children. They “obey” because “this is well pleasing to the Lord.” It may not seem pleasant to

them. They do it for the Lord. By obeying their parents they are submitting to the Lord.

Youth is not an excuse to disobey. The Holy Spirit doesn't make distinctions when it comes to age. The Bible is full of examples of young people serving the Lord by His enabling. Daniel did. Taken captive by the Babylonians, even as a young man, a teenager, he determined in his heart to please the Lord. So did Samuel. While the sons of Eli were busy defiling the Temple he remained true to the Lord.

Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

“Fathers” can be translated *parents*. This certainly applies to both parents but in the context of the father being the head of the wife it falls on the husband especially to be certain the children in the home are not being provoked.

“Provoke” means *to stimulate to anger* or frustration. It would include, but not be limited to, things like making unreasonable demands, or not listening to your children, or being inconsistent dealing with them. It really means that you need to invest a great deal of time and energy getting to know and understand each of your children as a unique individual whom God has given to you to nurture and grow. It means you need to be paying attention and shouldn't answer until you've really thought about what you're saying.

Paul was concerned that children would become “discouraged.” It means *to lose heart*. Don't do things that would discourage your kids. Their life is going to be tough enough without you disappointing them. Sacrifice yourself for their sake. It's what you signed-on for.

Jesus isn't asking you to do anything He hasn't done Himself. When Jesus was on the earth, submitted to His Father, He was in a lot of situations that were difficult (to say the least!). He looked past the people and the problems to His Father and lived to please Him. That is what it means to submit.

Jesus had a good friend, Lazarus. When Lazarus was sick, dying, I'm sure Jesus desired to heal Him. He waited. Why? Because He only did what His Father told Him to do. He submitted Himself to His Father in all things, at all times. Mary and Martha, and many others, suffered because Jesus waited. Lazarus died and they had to endure not only the grief associated with death but also the confusion of why Jesus didn't act. But we know why. It was for the glory of God when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

When we are called upon to submit, and we refuse because we think we know better, we are really missing the opportunity to see God glorified. Submission releases a power, a fragrance as it were, that fills the air with God.

#2 As For Me, On My Job
I Will Serve The Lord
(3:22-4:1)

In the context of this letter Paul never leaves the house. When he discussed "servants" and "masters" he was talking about household slaves. About half the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. You were either born of slave parents, or sold yourself into slavery to pay debts, or you were captured during a military conquest and enslaved.

For our purposes we rightfully apply these principles to our lives as employees and employers.

You notice immediately that Paul spent way more time on this subject than on the family. It might be because one of the men who delivered this letter to the church at Colossae was Onesimus. He was a slave who had run away from his master, Philemon. But as providence would have it, Onesimus encountered the apostle Paul and was saved by the message of the Gospel. Paul found out Onesimus was a runaway; Onesimus found out that Paul knew Philemon. So Paul sent him back with this letter and also wrote the letter to Philemon we have in our Bible's.

Thus this topic of masters and slaves would be of great interest in Colossae.

Colossians 3:22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.

Since we know the story of Onesimus it is better to see these as involuntary “slaves” rather than voluntary “bondservants.” If such conduct was required by slaves, how much more should we, as free employees, do for our earthly employers?

“Masters according to the flesh” would include owners and their foremen. For us it’s our boss or bosses, our supervisors, etc.

What follows is a checklist. Think of it as a job review.

- “Not with eyeservice” means not just when others are looking but all the time. It means to not keep your eye only on the clock.
- “As men-pleasers” means you’re not scheming to fool your employer into thinking you are a harder worker than you really are. You just work hard!
- “In sincerity of heart” speaks to your motives for working hard. It is the right thing to do.
- “Fearing God” is a reminder that your work speaks to others of your relationship with the Lord. **They see what kind of Lord He is by what kind of worker you are.**

Colossians 3:23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,

Here again is the basic, foundational principle. You work “as to the Lord.” You look past “men,” including your masters (bosses). You are working for Jesus and thus should do everything “heartily.” It means not just working hard but doing so with a right attitude, with ‘hearty good will.’

Colossians 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

This was really something precious to hear if you were a slave. Slaves had no earthly inheritance to look forward to. But in Heaven God was storing-up for them a great “inheritance” based upon their earthly work.

Imagine hearing this as a slave for the first time. You'd leave the Sunday night service, which was your only break in the week, and know that from then onward everything you did was "to serve the Lord" and not your earthly master. It's liberating.

Colossians 3:25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

This is a very interesting and informative verse. Paul was saying that God will show no "partiality" to slaves at the Reward Seat in Heaven. In other words, He won't be inclined to reward a slave more because he or she had such a terrible life on the earth. He will reward everyone on the basis of their faithfulness.

Wow. It hammers home the point that I am to look past my circumstances and the people in them to the Lord and serve Him.

Colossians 4:1 Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

One of the criticisms we level at folks who we are supposed to obey is that they don't have anyone 'over' them. *Not true!* Bosses have a Boss in Heaven. They, too, must always be looking to the Lord to do "what is just and fair."

At home or at work it comes down to this:

- In your house, can you say with real confidence that you are serving the Lord by submitting to your role and the authority over you?
- On your job, can you say with real confidence that you are serving the Lord by submitting to your role and the authority over you?
- For that matter, in your church can you say with real confidence that you are serving the Lord by submitting to your role and the authority over you?

The American family has broken down. Our society is crumbling as a result. **The way to rebuild it is for Christian families to quit breaking down.** It is for us to look at ourselves and take hold of this Joshua moment to serve the Lord.

Perhaps we should start thinking of ourselves as... Submissionaries!