

Interpersonal Relationships Col. 3, vs. 18 to 4, vs. 1

“18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. 20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. 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. 23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. 1 Masters, deal with your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”

Even though we will primarily be looking at domestic relationships, the principles we see in the scriptures on this apply to every relationship we have. If you are single, there are some invaluable insights you can gain from what Paul says to us that can be applied to the relationships you are in too.

Because Christ lives in us, we have the desire to know and do God’s will, but we need be able to give intelligent expression to our love for the Lord.

And there is no greater environment to walk this out than in a marriage – it’s the most difficult and the most rewarding of all possible relationships in this life.

Husbands and wives who are growing spiritually have the same desires for obedience and for the expression of love as Christ has, because it’s Christ’s life within us that fills us with the desire for righteousness.

As we grow and as our longing to see as God sees, and to love as God loves, also grows, the scriptures give us the guidance we need to expression to our newly forming desires in Christ.

It’s been a while since we were in Colossians, so I want to share a quote from one of the authors I read to make sure we can remember how Paul lays a foundation, spiritually, for everything in this chapter – including the marriage relationship.

“It is the new creation again, in Christ a new man has come, and that affects all our relationships with one another. When do we taste the first glory of the new creation experience? Every time we let go something of the old creation, of the self-life, in the reception of Christ in some way. When we say, ‘Now, Lord, it does not matter what it costs me of humiliation, if I have to be weak, foolish and despised (if I have to sacrifice to the point of personal suffering), nevertheless my desire is to show the Spirit of Christ.’ When we get through to that position, we know in our own hearts that we have a fresh taste of the joy of new life.”

Before we look at the specifics of husbands and wives, we have to first realize certain things about the newness of this new creation.

(Gal. 3:28) “(In Christ) there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

(2 Cor. 5:17) “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come.”

So, when we look at the responsibilities of husbands and wives, these responsibilities have nothing to do with our position before God in Christ. These responsibilities are simply roles assigned to us in this life, prior to eternity when our new bodies will reflect our new creation identity.

Another way to show this is to remember that when Paul discusses the roles of husband and wife, he uses Christ as the example.

(Eph. 5:22-27) “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

So, in relation to wives, we can see this principle of a specific temporal role assigned when we look at the relationship between Jesus and His Father;

(Phil. 2:5-11) “Have this mind in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be held on to, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ is God, but for 33 years in His role as the Son of Man, He “took the form of a servant”. And because He was willing to take this position before God, He was rewarded with the highest position of exaltation possible.

Probably the classic and most thorough description of the true servant heart of a wife is found in Prov. 31:10-31;

“If you can find a truly good wife, she is worth more than precious gems! 11 Her husband can trust her, and she will richly satisfy his needs. 12 She will not hinder him but help him all her life. 13 She finds wool and flax and busily spins it. 14 She buys imported foods brought by ship from distant ports. 15 She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household and plans the day’s work for her servant girls. 16 She goes out to inspect a field and buys it; with her own hands she plants a vineyard. 17 She is energetic, a hard worker, 18 and watches for bargains. She works far into the night! 19-20 She sews for the poor and generously helps those in need. 21 She has no fear of winter for her household, for she has made warm clothes for all of them. 22 She also upholsters with finest tapestry; her own clothing is beautifully made—a purple gown of pure linen. 23 Her husband is well known, for he sits in the council chamber with the other civic leaders. 24 She makes belted linen garments to sell to the merchants. 25 She is a woman of strength and dignity and has no fear of old age. 26 When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule for everything she says. 27 She watches carefully all that goes on throughout her household and is never lazy. 28 Her children stand and bless her; so does her husband. He praises her with these words:

29 “There are many fine women in the world, but you are the best of them all!” 30 Charm can be deceptive and beauty doesn’t last, but a woman who fears and reverences God shall be greatly praised. 31 Praise her for the many fine things she does. These good deeds of hers shall bring her honor and recognition from people of importance.”

My wife has nailed this with greater sacrifice for her family and for me personally than anyone I know. Much of it is hidden because it’s a behind-the-scenes labor of love; but it’s faithful and constant, and I have no doubt that “praise in the gates” is exactly what she will receive at the coming of Christ.

For husbands, I’m starting with a principle in the Bible that is the foundation for everything else in this relationship. Without this, nothing else will work; but once this is established, everything else can come together.

Your marriage will never be truly happy until you see your wife as a superior human being which you don’t deserve and for which you are eternally grateful that God brought her to you.

Let me show you why this is not only true, but why it’s so crucial;

“I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle” (1 Cor. 15:9)

“I am not worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants” (Lk. 15:19)

“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6)

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5)

“The man Moses was very humble, more than all people who were on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3)

“If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2)

“And (Peter) went out and wept bitterly” (Lk. 22:62)

“I am a child” (Jer. 1:6)

Here's some comments that relate to this principle from one of Spark's recent articles; it's his comments on the passage in John 3:30 which says, "He must increase, but I must decrease".

"What is spiritual growth? What is spiritual maturity? What is it to go on in the Lord? I fear we have got mixed ideas about this. Many think that spiritual maturity is a more comprehensive knowledge of Christian doctrine, a larger grasp of scriptural truth, a wider expanse of the knowledge of the things of God; and many such features are recorded as marks of growth, development, and spiritual maturity. (But the primary) hallmark of true spiritual development and maturity is this: that we have grown so much less and the Lord Jesus has grown so much more. The mature soul is one who is small in his or her own eyes, but in whose eyes the Lord Jesus is great. That is growth. We may know a very great deal, have a wonderful grasp of doctrine, of teaching, of truth, of the Scriptures (and we should), and yet we may be spiritually very small, very immature, very childish. Real spiritual growth is just this: I decrease, He increases. It is the Lord Jesus becoming more. You can test spiritual growth by that."

It is not until we are broken that we can bring true strength and compassion into the relationship.

You will lead, protect and guide, but because of what we just saw, you will find that it will all be done with compassion, humility and tenderness.

Even if you feel that she is in the wrong about something (it's rare, but it happens), never let anyone, no matter who they are, become of more value to you than her: Not your truck, not your fishing buddy, not your dog, not anyone.

I have one example that I saw personally, that I can share.

From around 16 to 20 years old, I was in a band and for anyone who is into playing music, especially in a band, it's extremely addicting. One of the guys in the band was a little older and was married. The rest of us weren't, so we could be as obsessive as we wanted to be. But for the other guy, a couple of things were happening over time. Since he had a family, he was working outside the band, because money wasn't exactly flowing in for us. And over time, his loyalty to the guys in the band was gradually superseding his loyalty to his family. It wasn't just

a time spent issue; his priorities were shifting. And he was becoming increasingly estranged from his wife. Eventually, he saw what was happening and left the band for a career that would provide what his family needed financially and give him time to focus on what mattered the most. That was incredibly hard because most people don't understand either the comradery that's formed in the relationships in a band, or the addictive power that music itself can have over us.

Your wife needs to know that no one on this planet is more important to you than she is. If you ever have to make a choice between her and anyone or anything else, including (and especially) yourself, you protect, provide for, and comfort your wife.

And as difficult as this may be, this includes your children. If one of them wants something, especially something that is ongoing, and giving them what they want interferes with a need your wife has, she takes priority every time.

Her needs come first, everybody else is secondary and they will have to live with that.

Don't forget verses 24 & 25 in this section of Colossians: "Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality."

As the Michael Jackson song says;

"I know he better be good to you, cause if he doesn't, I'll be there . . ."

Love is obviously the best motive for being a servant to your wife, but it never hurts to have a healthy respect for the Judgment Seat floating somewhere in the back of your mind.

Most husbands genuinely want to love their wives, and the scriptures teach us that the way to do this is to know her needs as related to spirit, soul, body

In Eph. 5 we saw earlier what is meant in this relationship as focused on the spirit. I'll read from the Amplified Version this time:

(Eph. 5:25-26, from the Amplified Bible), "Husbands, love your wives [seek the highest good for her and surround her with a caring, unselfish love], just

as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify the church, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word [of God].”

The “washing of water with the word of God” emphasizes the responsibility of the husband to be the spiritual leader, making sure that his wife has all she needs in terms of instruction from the scriptures.

And it’s not just providing spiritual insight or books or YouTube messages at home, it’s also doing all he can to ensure that whatever church they attend, the pastor is giving both of you what you need to grow in Christ.

If we, as husbands, aren’t growing, we have nothing to offer our wives spiritually, so our own prayer and study need to be faithful and diligent.

Now, related to the soul, the need is for comfort and communication. Wives need to be able to unload on their husbands; to cry, to complain, to share their hopes, wants and needs, and know that we will do everything we can to help resolve her concerns and meet her needs.

Regarding the body, we know that providing for her physical needs is a given so that she feels safe and knows she can trust you with this, but as sensitive as this next passage may be to some, it needs to be touched on briefly;

(1 Cor. 7:1-5) “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

That’s pretty self-explanatory, but as I said, husbands are to meet the physical needs of their wives and one of those needs is “conjugal”.

We all know that the sex-drives within marriages will likely vary – one will be stronger than the other. For husbands, the sacrifice comes into play when his drive is less than hers and she is trying to live with an unfulfilled need in this area.

When that's the case, a couple problems can happen. One is that she may resent her husband's unwillingness to help her in this way and the other is what Paul closes with in this section of 1 Cor. 7;

“. . . so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

In other words, the enemy will attack her on this ground and try to pull her toward the fulfillment of this need in ways that are sinful and damaging to her marriage – like adultery or pornography.

If she's a growing Christian she will fight this of course, but depending on her drive and how met or unmet her needs are, it may be a very difficult fight and her husband could lessen her struggle if he's willing to do so.

Finally, I'll close the section on marriage with some comments from Dr. Constable and F.F. Bruce, and from an essay I read focused on the word “agapao”;

“First, (in Col. 3:19) involves doing what is best for the one loved, sacrificing self-interests for those of the one loved; and behaving unselfishly. The Greek word translated “love” is agapao, which is the “all give” type of love, not phileo, the “give and take” type, nor eros, the “all take” type. And second, husbands must not allow a bitter attitude to develop toward their wives because of the wife's lack of submission or for any other reason. “Embittered” means irritated or cross. This attitude is a specific and all too common manifestation of lack of love.”

“The wife's subordination to her husband has as its counterpart the husband's obligation to love his wife. This is not simply a matter of affectionate feeling or sexual attraction; it involves his active and unceasing care for her well-being. . . Paul tells us the husband is not to be harsh with his wife. The forbearance and forgiveness which are enjoined in the preceding section of the letter, together with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, forbid a Christian man to be harsh in his treatment of anyone, but especially of his own wife.”

“The word “agapao” has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting a return. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. Agape love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment. It gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive.”

Now, let’s look at the section in Col. 3 that addresses children.

(Col. 3:20-21) “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

Since children are dependent on their parents to raise them in a way that makes this possible for them (which is why Paul adds verse 21 addressing fathers). I’ll focus on how the parents can help them in this.

Of all the training that we as parents can do to prepare our kids for later in life, nothing is more important than a respectful attitude and response to authority, for three major reasons:

- 1) The way they respond to authority as children will be the way they respond to authority as adults.
- 2) The way they respond to authority as adults will mirror the way they respond to the authority of God.
- 3) The way they respond to the authority of God will determine whether they are closed or open to the offers of Satan.

This is why there is such a huge emphasis in both the Old and New Testaments on how children treat those in authority. The Lord knows the implications of this and is trying to protect all of us from the deceptive power of the enemy.

Parents must never let their child disrespect them. They must never let them say “no” to the parent about something the parent has required of them.

If they can get away with defying their early-childhood imprinted authority, they will have no problem later defying the authority of God – Who put all other authorities in place to teach this principle.

If discipline is needed it has to be swift and effective. And any discipline, for any reason, must be followed up immediately with love, restoration, and forgiveness.

You can reread the parable of the prodigal son as often as it takes to be able to always have this in mind.

You are disciplining the action, not the person – you disapprove of what they did, not of who they are.

What’s the real point of all this?

Children who can’t control their emotions, or who get away with disrespect or defiance will eventually live in a chronic state of anxiety and frustration.

I know everyone’s heard the phrase, “Spare the rod, spoil the child”. That’s not exactly what the passage in Prov. 13:24 says, but it’s close; Here’s the actual passage: “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline and train him.” And Heb. 12 has a parallel passage; “You must submit to [correction for the purpose of] discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”

Let me share some comments on the Proverbs 13 passage I came across;

“The phrase ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ is a modern-day proverb that means if a parent refuses to discipline an unruly child, that child will grow accustomed to getting and demanding his own way. Proverbs 23:13 says, “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. You shall swat him with the reed and rescue his soul from Sheol”. So, in the context of verses 13–14, die means ‘experience spiritual death in hell.’ Children who respect authority are much more likely to come to Christ. Some people believe in discipline, but not in physical discipline such as spanking. However, the Bible is the final word on what is truth; what is best; it is not mere opinion or theory. The word rod indicates a thin stick or switch that can be used to give a small amount of physical pain with no lasting physical injury. A child should never be bruised, injured, or cut by a

physical correction. The Bible warns that parents should never abuse the power and authority they have over their children while they are young because it provokes the children to anger. Physical discipline is always done in love, never as a vent to the parent's frustration."

Even though it's true that parents must require the obedience of their children, parents can do a number of things that can either help, or that can hinder the ability of their child to do so. Col. 3:21 mentions one of them and F.F. Bruce does a great job of illustrating this, especially in the area of "not discouraging" them;

"Parents are urged not to irritate their children by being so unreasonable in their demands that the children lose heart and come to think that it is useless trying to please their parents. "

Let's move to our last section – Masters & Slaves (Col. 3:22-4:1)

The obvious application to our generation would be bosses and employees.

I've had good and bad 'masters'. When I was a chaplain in the Idaho Prison System, I reported to the warden who was retired military. His name was Joe Klauser, and like a parent doing their job by correcting when necessary (and when he did, you knew you were thoroughly corrected), but you also knew that he was 100% on your side.

He may have disapproved of your actions, but he never disapproved of you.

As for bad masters: the common trait I've noticed is arrogance and a complete lack of realizing the damage they are doing. They disapprove of both you and your actions.

"Justly and fairly" definitely fit Klauser, but with other bosses I've had, those things weren't even on their radar.

As for employees, we all know we're supposed to do the best we can, but Paul adds the nuance of "the reward of the inheritance"; that it won't be an earthly boss that ultimately evaluates us.

And here again we see that the “inheritance” is a reward, not something that all Christians receive simply by getting saved. Salvation isn’t a reward for certain behaviors; it’s a gift of grace to all who believe.

There aren’t any participation trophies handed out at the judgment seat.

I’ll close our study with some comments by F.F. Bruce on this segment of Colossians;

“All believers, according to Paul, must ‘appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense according to what he has done in the body’. (2 Cor. 5:10) . . . The judgment on disobedience is as certain as the reward for faithfulness. While salvation in the Bible is according to grace, judgment is according to works for believers as for unbelievers. For believers the recompense is rewards or loss thereof; for the unbeliever the judgment is condemnation. Sowing is now; reaping is hereafter. It may be difficult to understand how one who by grace is blessed with God’s salvation in Christ will nevertheless be requited for wrongdoing before the divine tribunal, but this is in accordance with Biblical instruction.”

I know it’s not always wise to lay out our failings before others; it’s especially for those in leadership to be this transparent, because it risks sabotaging the receptivity of those being led.

But since I don’t want you to spend your time over-absorbed with your own failings in this area (those of you who might have some), I know that the Lord’s evaluation of my own work history is not going to be my happiest time at the Bema Seat.

In some jobs I have given all I had, but with most I could definitely have put more effort in. This is not false humility; it’s a reality both I and the Lord are well aware of.

However, it’s not characteristic of all the areas of my Christian life, and even if it was, the issue at that judgment is rewards, not condemnation.

I could say the same in relation to my roles as husband and parent. It would be very presumptuous of me to say, like Paul said, “. . . the things you have learned and received and seen in me, practice these things. . .” (Phil. 4:9).

Fortunately, I'll be judged by a Person more supportive than Joe Klauser. A Father in heaven Who may disapprove of my actions with great clarity, but Who will never disapprove of me as His child.

And after the Lord reproves me, He will embrace me and reassure me of His infinite love.

“There will be no more tears, no more sorrow . . . for the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:4)

So, we definitely need to take our roles as husbands, wives, parents, employers and employees seriously; there are both temporal and eternal issues at stake.