

Engage

Thursday 21 December 2021

The Christian Household

Colossians 3:18-4:1

BEFORE MEETING TOGETHER

Watch the Bible Project video: Colossians, an Overview <https://youtu.be/pXTXIDxQsvc>

OPEN

'Freedom of choice' is one of the idols of our time. The suggestion of regulating or curtailing it is unthinkable for many people. But short-term freedom may lead to long-term captivity—slavery to chaos, injury and death. What proponents of absolute freedom fail to realize is that every exercise of supposed free choice severely limits all subsequent freedoms. The freedom of drivers to drive all over the road without looking just won't work over the long haul. We still need some Rules of the Road. One short "free" drive down the wrong side of the road could stop you ever being free to drive anywhere again. What Paul is offering in this passage of Scripture is a very brief Rules of the Road for household relationships.

What are some good things family members can do for each other? What are some harmful things?

STUDY

Read Colossians 3:18-4:1

What's your initial overall reaction to this passage?

What questions does this passage raise for you?

In 3:18-21 what are the underlying attitudes in how family members are to treat one another?

How do Paul's commands to wives and to husbands complement one another (18f)?

Paul's command to wives has come in for particular criticism. While I think verse 18 is best translated as "treat your husbands with respect," in many translations the key word in verse 18 comes out as *submit*. This conjures up the image of a downtrodden woman, the victim of her husband's every whim, unable to be herself, to think her own thoughts, to make a grown-up contribution to the relationship.

What indications are there in this passage that this "downtrodden" image is not at all what Paul has in mind?

What responsibilities do children and fathers have (20f)?

If each lived up to these, what would the resulting relationship look like?

How does belonging to Christ the Master make a difference in how slaves work for their earthly masters (22-25)?

How does belonging to Christ the Master make a difference in how earthly masters are to treat their slaves (4:1)?

In Paul's day husbands and masters could rule supreme and unquestioned. How are Paul's Rules of the Road for relationships every bit as revolutionary as what some people might wish he had said?

What principles might employers and employees draw out of verses 3:22-4:1?

Paul offers only very brief guidelines about various relationships, and so he must have intended his audience to work out the details for themselves. It is no bad thing, then, for us today to do the same. What different (but equally legitimate and biblical) ways of raising a family or relating to co-workers can you think of?

Paul's code for household relationships is remarkable for several reasons. Paul's own fellow-workers included women and married couples, where it appears the women were, in our phrase, people in their own right. He doesn't just tell wives, children and slaves how to behave (as many pagan moralists of his day would have done). Their duties are balanced by the corresponding duties of husbands, parents and masters.

Whether in your family or work context, how can you grow and change in how you treat other believers?

PRAY

Pray for Christian families who are under so much pressure to conform to the world's idea of freedom.ⁱ

NEXT TIME

Together in Prayer (*Colossians 4:2-18*)

ⁱ Tom Wright, Dale Larsen, and Sandy Larsen, *Colossians & Philemon: 8 Studies for Individuals or Groups*, For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London: SPCK, 2009).