

## **Colossians 3:18-4:1 Study Questions**

Throughout the book of Colossians, we have seen how Paul beautifully exalts the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Paul deals with the heresies and challenges of the Colossae church in chapters 1 and 2. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul's focus shifts from doctrinal truths to practical truths. Paul has shifted his focus from speaking to a general audience, to now specifically addressing the people of God. His argument went from, behold Jesus and His deity, to those who are "in Jesus" live differently.

In Colossians 3:18-4:1, Paul provides specific instructions to believers as they deal with the most important and intimate relationships they have, their home. Paul deals with three key areas of interpersonal relationships: husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employee.

**Disclaimer:** One may read these texts and draw certain conclusions that are not the intention or heart behind the text. Some in our culture have labeled the biblical ethos for families, especially the marriage relationship, as oppressive and enslaving. Others have concluded that the Bible endorses slavery and the oppression of others based on social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

But consider for a moment the context (the culture) in which this text was written. This text was written in an ancient culture several thousand years ago. This text was introduced into the culture; and, at that time, it was very revolutionary. For example, women had very few rights, very little standing. A woman couldn't own property, own a business or open a business. Most of the weight in that culture rested with the man. In fact, women were considered property of men. Literally, just like a man might own camels or donkeys or fields, he owned a wife. In religious society, specifically Jewish culture, a Jewish woman could not divorce her husband unless he abandoned the faith, got leprosy, or raped a virgin. Jewish men, on the other hand, could divorce their wives for practically any reason. It was groundbreaking in that culture for Paul to come along and say, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" and "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh to them."

Under Roman law, enslaved people had no personal rights and were regarded as the property of their masters. They could be bought, sold, and mistreated at will and were unable to own property, enter into a contract, or legally marry. So this message about treating others in our home was revolutionary to our interactions in these relationships.

The trap, as we read this passage, is to think the Bible is condoning this sort of culture, which it is not. What the Bible is doing is speaking into the moment, into the culture, with the heart and the transforming power of Christ. The Bible is not condoning the subjugation of women or slavery or the abuse of those less vulnerable (children). Rather, the Bible is speaking to the transforming power of God within those relations and puts these relationships in a "heavenly" framework. (Remember Col. 3:1-4.) Thus, through our family relationships, we have the great potential to demonstrate the same principles of the gospel message. (i.e., submission, love, sacrifice, obedience, honesty, fairness).

### **Reflect on the following questions:**

1. Read Colossians 3:18-4:1. How would you describe the ideal marriage defined by culture? How is God's ideal different? And why does God's ideal seem (or come across as) oppressive?

2. What is the key feature of the wife's attitude to her husband? What do you think "as is fitting in the Lord" means? Consider the gospel of Jesus Christ and how Jesus Christ submitted to the Father and discuss what this looks like practically.

3. What is the key feature of the husband's attitude to his wife? Looking at the gospel of Jesus Christ, how does Christ's love for us inform husbands how to love their wives? (See Ephesians 5:21-25) Why do you think Paul specifically tells husbands, "And do not be harsh with them"?

### **Digging deeper:**

A powerful tool in a Christian's arsenal is confession to the Lord. It is by confession that we are saved. (Romans 10:10) It is by confession that we are healed. When we confess, we are saying that God is right, and we are not. I often find myself while confessing to God, being convicted by God, to also confess to the person that I have wronged. James 5 says, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." I admit this is a struggle. This requires humility and humbling ourselves. It is the "killing of our flesh."

I often equated confession with shame, guilt, "get ready for the doghouse." I bought into the lie that I need to "protect my wife" and not drag her into the struggle. If I share with her, it will only push us further apart. Yet nothing could be further from the truth! Although hard on me and her, every time I did confess, the unity and intimacy in our relationship only grew. We grew closer to each other and closer to God as his healing spirit was being poured out over our relationship, which only solidified our marriage.

I want to encourage you, if you are a husband and have not "loved your wife" and have "treated her harshly," to confess these things to her.

I want to encourage you, if you are a woman and have not been "submissive" to your husband or have subverted your husband's God-given leadership, confess these things to him.

4. In our culture, parents are under all sorts of pressure to produce children who have very high self-regard, who view themselves as extremely important, who are academic and who are sporting winners. None of these things are wrong per se, but God only requires parents to achieve one thing: get your children to obey you. Discuss why you think obedience to parents is the only thing that God requires of children? Why do you think Paul specifically says, "in everything"? Why do you think Paul specifically tells Fathers, "Do not provoke them, lest they become discouraged"?

5. Read verses 22-23. Regardless, whether you have a boss, or are the CEO of a company, we all answer to someone at work. According to these verses, what is our main motivation for work? Discuss how this attitude will affect the way we work? How would you encourage someone who says, "I work my best, but I don't get any recognition from my boss"? How would you encourage someone who has a really bad boss?

6. In your own words, describe what God wants from employers? What motivates them to obey God? Practically, what might this look like?