

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

# The DEVO

NOVEMBER 2 - 6, 2020

## Above All

8.30 - 11.22

BOOK OF COLOSSIANS



# MONDAY

## Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

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In Colossians 3:18 – 4:1, Paul shifts his focus from how believers should live with one another in Christ’s church to how believers should treat one another within their own households. The idea that households should live according to certain rules was not unique to Paul. In fact, “household rules” were a common device used by secular and religious writers to dispense moral advice. The general justification for such rules among Greek and Roman writers was simply that such behavior was fitting, natural, or one’s duty. When Paul picks up this topic in his letter to the Colossian church, it is not so much a new topic, but merely a shift of focus. Everything Paul had written in the preceding 17 verses regarding how Christians should treat one another still applies to the specific instructions he is now about to give regarding households.

Let’s reflect on how Paul engaged his own culture. In the preceding verses Paul has urged the Colossians to recognize that living as the community of God under the loving authority of Christ means that believers need to behave differently from the rest of society. Believers’ minds should be set on things above (3:2); they should deny the desires of their earthly nature (3:5); and they should avoid uncontrolled outbursts and dishonesty (3:8-9). Instead, they should allow God’s love for them to be reflected in their love for others (3:12-14), and they should live in peaceful harmony (3:15-17). They were to be radical exceptions to the culture in which they lived.

Yet when it comes to how believers should relate to those in their own household, Paul seems to accept and revise rather than oppose a cultural tradition. While many of his statements are similar to the household rules of his contemporaries, Paul “baptizes” or “Christianizes” such rules by squarely setting them in the context of behavior that is qualified as “*in the Lord*” (3:18, 20, 22-24). In other words, rather than rejecting these behavioral norms of his day, he seeks to rethink what such behaviors look like in the context of living as a Christian. By example Paul shows that believers live in tension with their culture, needing to discern when to oppose and when to accept and revise the norms and behaviors of our society.

## QUESTIONS

What American social norms or behaviors should Christians oppose? Which should we adapt? What does it look like to live “*in the Lord*” in our society?

## PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

The mission of Sowing Seeds for Life is to provide food for the hungry, respond to emergencies for those in need, and to eliminate hunger in the communities in which we serve. It is our goal to serve our communities with dignity and respect. Pray for safe travels for volunteers picking up donations to stock the food pantry.

# TUESDAY

## Ephesians 5: 22-33

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The first household instructions that Paul adapts are instructions to wives and husbands who form the center of families. In Ancient Roman society, the head of the household—which was generally a man—had tremendous authority over the rest of the household. In this respect, as is true in most societies, the structure of the family resembled the structure of society.

Given that Rome was an empire, ruled by an emperor and an all-male senate, women typically were expected to submit to their husbands. Paul does not dispute this social norm. Doing so could have been perceived as subversive and rebellious within Roman society. Throughout Paul's writings he is eager to show that there should be no basis for Roman authorities to persecute believers. Therefore, wives should (continue to) submit to their husbands as is fitting.

The language Paul uses in Colossians 3:18 could well have been written by any Jewish, Greek, or Roman moralist, except for the final three words: "*in the Lord.*" This final qualifier frames Paul's instruction in the broader context of all he has written about the new community of God. In Galatians 3:28 Paul wrote, "*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ.*"

So what does it mean for a woman to submit to her husband when she and her husband have equal standing and, in fact, are one in Christ?

At the very least, it means the relationship between a Christian wife and husband—one which is “*in the Lord*”—represents something new in comparison to the norms of Roman society.

This new normal continues in Colossians 3:19 where Paul writes, “*Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*” In Ephesians 5:25-33, Paul expands this thought by urging husbands to love their wives as their own bodies (5:28) as a reflection of the way Christ loves the church (5:25). In this letter he simply urges husbands to love their wives without harshness.

Given the powerful position that men typically occupied as the heads of households, it would have been easy for them to impose their will on others—including their wives—with harshness. Paul clarifies that such behavior is unacceptable for those who are “*in the Lord.*” A Christian husband’s relationship to his wife should be characterized by loving gentleness, recognizing that they are “*one in Christ.*”

## QUESTIONS

How do you recognize Christ in your spouse or friends/co-workers of the other gender? What does it mean for us to relate to others “*in the Lord*”?

## PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray for the Lord to watch over and help those setting up for pantry distribution. Inspire many hearts to volunteer at SSFL to help the hungry.

# WEDNESDAY

## Colossians 3:20, 21

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After starting with the relationship between spouses, Paul now turns to the relationship between children and fathers. As we have already noted this week, fathers were typically the heads of households in Roman society. In our 21st Century American democratic society, we should probably think of Paul's instructions applying equally to fathers and mothers, especially since more than 18% of American households are headed by single mothers.

Paul's instructions to children are simply, "*Obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord*" (3:20). While this would have been consistent with the advice of Paul's contemporaries, it is also reminiscent of the Fifth Commandment: "*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you*" (Exodus 20:12). A more literal rendering of the final words of Paul's instruction here would be, "... *for this is pleasing in the Lord.*"

Once again, we see that Paul is concerned to frame this moral instruction in the context of what it means to live as believers. Children should obey their parents so as not to offend them or give them any reason to criticize them as Christians. Paul does not address what one should do when obeying one's parents would mean dishonoring or disobeying God. In this letter, he is happy to focus on broad principles rather than specific details and exceptions.

Paul's instruction to fathers is, "*Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged*" (3:21). Whereas children are to obey their parents, fathers are to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of their children. Such advice probably seemed to some of the Colossian Christians who were steeped in a very authoritarian culture as too soft or as treating children as too fragile. However, if we keep in mind Paul's overriding concern to explain how being "*in the Lord*" should be reflected in all our relationships, then his admonition to fathers makes sense.

Fathers need to see children not only as their offspring, but as those who are their equals in Christ. Recognizing the potential that children have to grow in their relationships with the Lord, fathers should look for ways to encourage them and motivate them, not exasperate them. Parents are responsible to exemplify, cultivate, and shape their children's relationships with Christ. Any behavior that would be detrimental to those relationships should be avoided.

## QUESTIONS

What does "obeying your parents" look like for you, given your age and stage in life? If your parents are deceased, what does it mean to honor them still? How can you build up your children or other young people in your sphere of influence?

## PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray for those in need of food to find their way to the pantry and to invite friends and neighbors as well.

# THURSDAY

## Colossians 3:22 – 25

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Paul turns his attention to the relationship between slaves and masters in 3:22 – 4:1, since slaves were often members of Roman households. Some have criticized Paul for not condemning slavery. But as we have noted, Paul’s concern is to help the Colossians think about what it means to be a Christian regardless their station in life rather than challenging the institution of slavery. Ultimately, Christian truths were instrumental in bringing an end to slavery. But in the Colossian context, Paul was more interested in helping Christian slaves and masters live as Christians than leading a slave rebellion.

In line with the rest of the instructions that Paul has provided in this section of household rules, Paul urges slaves to “*obey their earthly masters in everything,*” but to do so out of a sense of serving the Lord (vv. 22-23). Immediately we see how Paul attempts to Christianize what would have been a fairly common instruction. By adding the adjective “*earthly*” to his reference to masters, he underscores that both slaves and masters have a common master, the Lord. Christian slaves were not to serve their earthly masters out of self-interest (only when they are watching), “*but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord*” (v. 22).

Paul adds further motivation for such conduct by noting that slaves “*will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward*” (v. 24). There are layers of irony in this statement. The first layer is that Roman law



excluded slaves from receiving any inheritance. The second layer is that the Greek word Paul uses for *reward* is very similar to the Greek word for punishment. Although *punishment* is what many slaves experienced from their masters, Paul reminds slaves that they are ultimately serving the Lord who will reward them with an inheritance. Paul underscores this thought by adding, “*It is the Lord Christ you are serving*” (v. 24), a statement that applied to both slaves and masters.

Although this text is often applied today to employees and employers, we should recognize that the differences between slaves/masters and employees/employers are greater than the similarities. However, if Paul were writing to 21st Century American Christian workers, he would likely have similar encouragements: as you work, recognize that you are working for the Lord, not just another person; work in an honorable manner; whatever you do, work at it wholeheartedly; and look to the Lord for His rewards.

## QUESTIONS

What does it mean for you to “*work for the Lord*” in whatever you do? How can this perspective shape your view of those for whom you work (even if that means customers)?

## PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray that God would help to remove the stigma of hunger and help all food orders to be filled.

# FRIDAY

## Colossians 3:24 – 4:1

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Yesterday we noted that the final statement of 3:24, *“It is the Lord Christ you are serving,”* applied equally to both slaves and masters. Paul’s final statement of the chapter similarly applies equally to both groups: *“Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism”* (v. 25).

These final two statements of the chapter provide both positive and negative reasons for slaves and masters who are *“in the Lord”* to think of one another differently from the norms of the prevailing culture. The common element in both statements is the equality that exists in the Lord.

Earlier in the week we referenced Galatians 3:28, which includes the statement, *“There is neither... slave nor free, ... for you are all one in Jesus Christ.”* The distinction between slave and free no longer makes sense when the two are *“one in Jesus Christ.”* Since both are serving the same Lord and the Lord shows no favoritism but repays each person for his or her wrongs, both Christian slave and Christian master were to treat one another as fellow-servants of the Lord.

This fundamental understanding of the changed relationship and dynamic between slaves and masters is further expanded by Paul’s final statement on the subject: *“Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven”* (4:1).

Masters who recognized that they were accountable to the same heavenly Master whom their slaves served should have thought twice before mistreating their slaves because the slaves had an Advocate in their heavenly Master. Paul was calling on masters to rethink the authority and power dynamics between them and their slaves in a radical way, based on their common experience of being followers of Jesus.

We need to exercise the same caution that we discussed yesterday about applying these instructions to employers/employees today. Perhaps a more fruitful way to apply this text is to think of relationships in which we have a power advantage over others. Whether that power advantage stems from economic, social, relational, educational, or personal factors, we can all probably identify relationships in which we hold an advantage over others. In such relationships, particularly with fellow believers, do we see ourselves as one in the Lord with them? Do we accept that the Lord will hold us accountable for what we do with our power advantage? Are we concerned to do what is right and fair?

## QUESTIONS

Consider how you have treated others over whom you have a power advantage. Do you see them as your equal? Are there any behaviors of which you need to repent? What would your Master in heaven have you do?

## PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray for a restorative day of rest for the volunteers to return to the pantry ready to share kindness.



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