

## SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

in the presence of the others from what he knows of the holy scriptures or from his own heart.”

### **V. 17 And Whatever You Do, In Word Or Deed –**

The Christian must not divide his life into “Sunday behavior” and “everyday behavior.” Since God is always with him, anything that is out of place on Sunday is always out of place.

This broad commandment made it unnecessary for Paul to list any further “Do’s” and Don’t’s.” The Christian life does not consist of outward conformity with a legal code, but inward renewal of the heart.

### **Do Everything In The Name Of The Lord Jesus –**

This general principle is far better than an exhaustive code of laws. If a certain practice cannot be done in the name of Jesus, don’t do it!

### **Giving Thanks To God The Father Through Him**

– Christian behavior may be summed up as the life lived in gratitude toward God (v. 15). When one is constantly aware of the debt of love he owes to God, it will be hard for him to stray very far from the paths of righteousness.

## STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What things are included in “things that are on earth”?
2. What is the basis of Paul’s exhortation toward moral excellence in verse one?
3. What is meant by the statement “you also will appear with him in glory”?
4. How is idolatry linked with covetousness?
5. What is the difference between anger and wrath? Is the “wrath of God” a defect in God’s character?
6. What was a Scythian? Why did Paul mention them?
7. Explain “God’s chosen ones.” Who does the choosing?
8. Can you think of any virtue that is not included in the concept of love?
9. In what way does “be thankful” (v. 15) relate to the Christian’s behavior?
10. Is verse 16 describing a “church service”? How does this verse relate to verse 17?

## Lesson Eleven

### (3:18 - 4:1)

#### **Instructions For The Family (3:18-21)**

*18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

**V. 18 Wives** – If the new nature in a Christian really reaches into every area of his behavior (v. 17), it will affect his family and his job. Paul was not abruptly changing the subject at this point. He was showing individual Christians specific ways in which they would live the new life.

Ladies, first. . . .

**Be Subject To Your Husbands** – “Be subject was a military term meaning “to be arranged under the authority of someone.” God set the husband as the head of the family (Eph. 5:23) and commanded the wife to respect his leadership (Eph. 5:33). The command is expressed here as a present imperative, meaning “be subject and keep on being subject” in a continuing way.

A few points need to be made here about the Bible’s teaching on the submission of the wife to the husband (I Cor. 11:3-16; 14:34-36; Eph. 5:21-33; Titus 2:5; I Pet. 3:1-6). First, notice that the wives are told to be subject; the husbands are not told to put them in subjection. The husband’s responsibility is not to get the upper hand over

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his wife; his duty is to love her (v. 19). Voluntary submission is the wife's responsibility. If she is unwilling to assume that role voluntarily, it is doubtful that forcing the role upon her will achieve God's purposes.

Second, the wife's submission and the husband's love are something they owe the Lord, even more than they owe each other. Even if the husband is a clod, the wife should be subject to him, because the Lord is no clod and He deserves to be obeyed. Even if the wife is unlovely, the husband should love her, because he owes it to the Lord. This principle adds permanency to marriage. The relationship is not based on fickle responses to a fickle spouse, but on steadfast obedience to an unchanging Lord.

Third, God's recipe for happiness in the Christian family cannot be guaranteed if part of the ingredients are left out. If a Christian wife submits, but an un-Christian husband does not love, the results may not be satisfactory. Even so, the best chance a Christian wife has in this unfortunate situation is to submit and try to make it work. (See I Pet. 3:1-2.)

Fourth, the husband has not been appointed to be God. His authority is only a delegated authority and has limitations. Consider the parallel between the family and the government. Just as the wife is to "be subject" (*hupotassethe*) to her husband, the Christian citizen is to "be subject" (*hupotassasthe*) to his government (Rom. 13:1). The Christian submits to his government because God ordained it, and to disobey is to resist God's command (Rom. 13:2). However, if government tries to oppose the clear and specific command of God, the Christian's highest allegiance is to God (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Likewise, the wife is subject to her husband because God made the husband head (Eph. 5:23). If, however, the husband comes into irreconcilable conflict with the authority of God, the wife's highest allegiance is to God. (Compare Luke 14:26; I Cor. 7:15.)

**As Is Fitting In The Lord** – The word "fitting" refers to what is "proper, one's duty, the service one owes." It is more than just what is "socially acceptable," for it is one's duty "in the Lord."

**V. 19 Husbands** – It may have shocked some of the first century readers, but husbands also have a duty toward their wives. Until now, husbands had all the rights and privileges, and wives had all the duties. According to Jewish law, for instance, a husband could divorce his wife, but a wife could not divorce her husband.

In Roman, Greek, and Jewish law, adultery could be committed only against the husband—not against the wife. If a man's wife had a sexual affair with any other man, it was adultery against her husband. If the husband had an affair with an unmarried or foreign woman, it was not adultery. If he had an affair with the wife of his

countryman, it was adultery—but against his countryman, not against his own wife!

Christianity made marriage a joint responsibility.

**Love Your Wives** – The husband's responsibility is not to dominate his wife, but to love her.

The kind of love God commands from the husband for his wife is *agape* love. This is the divine kind of love, motivated not by self-interest (as *eros*, the sexual love) or even by the attractiveness of the one loved (as *philia*), but by a sincere interest in the well-being of the other. Love based on self-interest will fail whenever the object of love fails to gratify selfish lusts. Love based on attractiveness will fail whenever the object of love grows older, fatter, sicker, or balder. True *agape* love includes sexual desire and appreciation for attractive qualities, but it is based on a permanent concern for the one loved. It is the only love that goes on loving whether circumstances are better or worse, whether richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death parts the lovers.

In the parallel passage in Eph. 5:21-33, Paul found in Christ the perfect example of a husband's love and a wife's submissiveness. As the church submits to Christ as head, so should the wife submit to her husband. As Christ gave himself up for the church, so should the husband give of himself and be sacrificially concerned for the well-being of his wife.

**And Do Not Be Harsh With Them** – It seems a strange quirk of human nature that sometimes we treat worst those whom we love most. It is, after all, those who are the closest to us who have the greatest capacity to provoke us.

Sometimes the husband is harsh because he is trying to prove he is the boss. Sometimes he acts out of bitterness to retaliate against the woman responsible for his "loss of freedom." Sometimes he is cross because she has failed him by not living up to his "expectations." All of these are simply the result of the husband's focus of attention on himself instead of on his wife. This is not love.

**V. 20 Children, Obey Your Parents In Everything** – The word "obey" literally means "to hear under." It means that one must give heed to the person in authority and do what he says. The word "obey" is also directed toward slaves (v. 22), but is never used as a commandment for the wife.

This is one of the few commandments in the Bible given specifically to children. Whatever else the church teaches children, it must not fail to teach them to obey their parents. Obedience to parents is a child's basic training to prepare him for obedience to God.

What about the phrase "in everything"? Must a child always obey his parents no matter how wicked or evil their

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command might be? First, it is to be assumed that Paul had a Christian family in mind. While the parents may be unwise, they would hardly be evil. In such a situation, the child should always obey. Second, the authority of parents is a delegated authority and is subordinate to the authority of God. If a child is told to steal or kill, for instance, divine law obviously takes precedence.

**For This Pleases The Lord** – In the original Ten Commandments, the command to honor one’s parents was the only commandment with the promise of a reward (Eph. 6:1-4). The Lord finds great “delight” in obedient children.

**V. 21 Fathers** – Again, there is a mutual responsibility. Contrary to the Roman law of the first century, fathers owed their children certain duties in return. According to Roman law, a father could do anything he liked with his child. He could reject it at birth, casting it out of the house to die. He could sell the child into slavery, work him in the fields, or even pronounce and execute the legal sentence of death.

**Do Not Provoke Your Children** – The father must realize that his child has certain sensitivities. Whether in “jest” or in anger, he must not wound the child’s inner being and sense of self-respect. Some of the more obvious ways to provoke (“rouse to fight, irritate, chafe”) a child are:

- a. Ridicule, especially in public
- b. Constant criticism
- c. Impossible proliferation of rules
- d. Unfair punishment

In every child there is a deep-seated sense of what is fair and right. The wise parent will work with this sensitivity, not against it.

**Lest They Become Discouraged** – A child can only take so much. If he is provoked beyond his limit, he will give up; he will “despair” of ever pleasing his parents. He may resign himself to a life of quiet failure, or he may become totally defiant. It all depends on how much spunk he has. Either way, the parent has failed.

### **Instructions For Slaves And Masters (3:22 – 4:1)**

*22 Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord; 23 Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

*1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

**V. 22 Slaves** – The practice of slavery was widespread in the first century. As much as one-third of the population of Rome and other great cities was made up of slaves. Slaves were considered inferior by birth, naturally fitted for slavery. Slaves were mere chattel property, completely at the disposal of their masters. Masters had the legal right to torture or kill their slaves. Finally under the emperor Hadrian (117-138 A.D.), masters were required to get permission from the court before killing a slave; and under Constantine (306-337 A.D.), the practice was prohibited altogether. Even Constantine, however, said it was all right if the slave died accidentally as the result of a good flogging.

**Obey In Everything Those Who Are Your Earthly Masters** – Although a slave was the same as a free man in the eyes of God (v. 11), he still had to live out the role of a slave here on earth. If his master was a Christian, he could not take advantage of his brotherly equality and serve him any less (I Tim. 6:1-2). If his master was not a Christian, he could not treat him with contempt, but must be a model servant for the sake of the gospel (Titus 2:9-10). Whether the master was gentle or overbearing, the slave must be obedient and submissive (I Pet. 2:18).

Why did Paul support the evil practice of slavery? Why didn’t he sound the call to revolt? First of all, it would not have been good for Christianity to tie itself to a slave revolt. The difficult circumstances of the first century were not to be solved by so simple a remedy. Other revolts had been attempted, and they always failed. Christianity had a solution that was slower, but more long lasting—the teaching of brotherhood. Second, Paul knew that a man did not have to be personally and politically free to be a Christian. He could be God’s child whether slave or free. Third, Paul knew that it was more important that a man learn obedience and servanthood—the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5)—than that he enjoy the luxury of liberty. In at least one sense, it was easier for a slave to become Christ-like than for a free man.

**Not With Eyeservice, As Men-Pleasers** – Paul apparently coined the Greek word for “eyeservice,” since it is found nowhere except here and the parallel passage in Eph. 6:5-9. The picture of the slave who works only when being watched is so clear that it needs no explanation.

**But In Singleness Of Heart** – The slave must serve his master with “sincere, single-minded purpose.”

**Fearing The Lord** – It is not the lashes of the overseer’s whip but the fear of the Lord that should goad the slave into action. Three verses in succession carry this same theme: It is the Lord, not men, whom you serve.

**V. 23 Whatever Your Task, Work Heartily** – Naturally the slaves were given the jobs that were too hard or dirty for a free man to do. Regardless of this, the

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Christian slave should work with a zealous commitment springing from his heart.

Note: If this principle was valid for the involuntary slave, how much more should it apply to the modern employee who willingly agreed to do his job?

**As Serving The Lord And Not Men** – The faithful service of a slave would not only bring money to his early master, it would also bring honor and glory to his Master in heaven.

**V. 24 Knowing That From The Lord You Will Receive The Inheritance As Your Reward** – The slave should not be distressed if he does not receive fair recompense for all his labor. The Lord in heaven is also keeping track of the books, and He will see that the worker gets all his back pay—and more! When he receives his eternal inheritance (1:12), he will be amply repaid for his troubles.

**You Are Serving The Lord Christ** – For the third time, Paul has repeated this. The slave is not really working for his earthly master, but for the Lord!

**V. 25 For The Wrongdoer Will Be Paid Back For The Wrong He Has Done** – There will be a great evening of the scales of justice in heaven. The exploited slave will finally receive his due. The exploiting master will also receive his due, when the Lord gives him his inheritance in hell.

**And There Is No Partiality** – Unlike Roman law, God does not have a separate system of justice for masters. There is no “face-taking” with God, for he treats all men alike. If a man has been cruel and abusive, he will be punished, no matter who he is.

God is not one-sided in his social concerns. He is neither pro-labor nor pro-management. He wants each side to take care of its own responsibilities. The same God who wants soldiers to “be content with your wages”(Luke 3:14) is also outraged when the wages of the laborers are kept back by fraud (James 5:4). If anything, God’s wrath seems to be hottest against those who become wealthy by withholding from their workers. (See James 5:1-6.)

**V. 1 Masters, Treat Your Slaves Justly And Fairly** – Once again, as in the family, there is mutual obligation. Regardless of legal constraints, the master is obligated before God to “provide what is right and equitable” for his slaves. In practice, this meant the master treated the slave more like an employee than a bondservant, ultimately granting him his freedom.

**Knowing That You Also Have A Master In Heaven** – This simple reminder was much more effective in bringing an end to slavery than an open revolt would have been. God will treat the master according to the way he treated his slaves! The earthly masters would one day stand before the court of heaven on equal footing with

their slaves. There they would answer for the way they had treated some of God’s children.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How does the instruction for wives fit into modern society? Should women wear a veil, cover their heads, and walk two paces behind their husbands?
2. Does the husband’s love for his wife mean that he will sometimes subordinate his own wishes to the well-being of the wife? Is he then in “submission” to her?
3. Why should children obey their parents?
4. How can a father provoke his child? Can you add to the list given with verse 21?
5. What was slavery like in the first century? How did people justify such treatment of their fellowmen?
6. Why didn’t Paul call for an abrupt halt to slavery?
7. Notice that twice as many lines were written about slavery as were written about family duties. Could this have anything to do with the mention of Onesimus in 4:9?
8. For what Master were the slaves really working?
9. Whose side was God on—the slaves’ or the masters’?
10. What were the earthly masters to remember?