

Colossians Pt 6

Col. 3:18-4:1 (*Household Codes*)

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Key ideas: Wives submit, Husbands love, children obey, masters are fair by being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient. This is how they LEAD and communicate the gospel to a needy world.

Remember that Paul, the author of Colossians, hasn't met the church in Colossae but has only heard of them through Epaphras.

To review from last week, I gave you a mnemonic to remember the first 17 verses of Colossians 3:

- Seek** (intimacy)
- Set** (direction)
- Put** (off control) **Put** (on vulnerability)
- Let** (the Spirit sing)

Col 3:11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

We don't need to know about the categories in verse 11: what is important is Christ is in all and over all: you come as children of God as sons, brothers, priests, holy. Nothing makes ME more important than YOU! Hold on to this.

A helpful way to remember this next passage:

- 1. The List**
- 2. The Modifiers (of that list)**
- 3. The Special Cases**

We need to start by going back to verse 17:

Col 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

As we talk about the **household codes**, we need to hold onto verse 17. **“Whatever”** means **all** your words or deeds. Moreover, we are people of **thanksgiving** all the time: we respond to Christ's death and

the hope of eternity...this is what puts us into a mindset of thanksgiving. If you ask the world about Christians, the world rarely describes Christians as thankful people. However, we should be known as THE people of thanksgiving, lining up all our words and deeds under Jesus. There is a mutuality in the kingdom of God that we must hold onto as we look at the household codes.

The List and its Modifiers:

The List	Wives – Submit
	Husbands – Love
	Children – Obey
	Slaves – Obey
	Masters – Provide fairness

Special Cases

Special case #1: (vs 21...not in the order of the text)

21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

This is the same word in Heb 10:24, 25: provoked. Don't provoke your children. Fathers are the highest authority in the first century church: they can do whatever they want. But Paul is undoing this which applies to us today as well. The picture is best understood with little children: A child is playing peacefully in one direction and dad appears in the middle of this disrupting and discouraging them. Paul is asking fathers to care for their children's nervous systems: since you are big and more powerful and have nervous systems more regulated, be very careful to encourage and not discourage. Paul is trusting fathers to care for their children, to have compassion and gentleness with their children.

Special case #2:

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

We have a different perspective of this today. Two-thirds of all people were involved in slavery in the early church. You could pay your debts by selling yourself into slavery. Or maybe you were born into slavery. As a slave, you might be better than a free person: there was no consistency.

For us today, we can learn about what to do when we are in unfair power structures. Verse 25 makes sense. But previously, favoritism meant everyone would receive the same judgment. We actually serve Jesus. Paul says we shift the way we understand one another.

Let's go back and try to understand the **list** and their **modifiers**:

Wives - submit

18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Submit means organizing units under commanders, a chain of command. Or it could mean coming alongside someone to help them. A picture of a man removing boulders from the land and asking for help from someone else. This person questions how they could make this easier. This is not a submission. The helper is not to ask why, he trusts the guy knows what he is doing and comes alongside and aids him. This is what the word means.

Husbands - **love**: agape. This is to be like Jesus, to give a life and pour out himself. For husbands, this means to honor your wife, lift her up, proclaim who she is, to give her a new ID. You name your wife, you proclaim her beauty, you honor her position, you call her into who she is.

Children - obedience

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

This is NOT saying clean the kitchen and do it. It means to pay careful attention to what you are telling them to do, this is honoring your mother and lifting her up.

Masters - fairness.

4 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Masters should provide what they have: justice and fairness.

The Christian household is called to **submit, love, obey and provide fairness.**

I could read the Bible and make a case that husbands should submit to their wives and wives should agape love their husbands since we are **all** called to submit and obey. But there is a reason Paul says it in the way he does because each one of these roles *expresses the gospel in a way no other can*. For example, when a wife submits, she preaches the gospel in a way no other action can. It's the same for husbands: when they love and honor their wives, they proclaim the gospel. There is a design: when

children obey, it's contrary to a cultural flow. When the weak person honors the person in power, the gospel is proclaimed. When masters level out the playing field, the gospel is proclaimed.

So **how** do wives submit? I cannot say to you what each situation should look like. But I can tell you the **stance** a wife should have. Look at these verses which tell you and me HOW each of these household codes should be carried out:

Col 3:12-13 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

This is who you are! **Dearly loved** is what a child does with their stuffed animal. This is the kind of affection when you clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. When a wife is kind, humble, merciful, gentle, and patient with her husband and bears with him and forgives, these are what makes her truly submissive. And when a husband does these things to his wife, he is truly loving her.



The point of a spear that a woman leads with is this kind of submission.

The same with my husband and children who lead with love and obedience.

These household codes really are callings to the same things as listed in these verses. This is a difficult list! Instead of asking about specific situations, you would be better served to ask "how would it look like to be patient with my husband? Compassionate with my husband? Kind to my husband? etc."

Let's go back to verse 18:

18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is **fitting** in the Lord.

Fitting to the Lord: In Genesis, God creates Adam but he alone and needs a helper. Nobody knows how to translate this word HELPER or HELP MEET which could mean ally, suitable helper. The Septuagint NT translation of Col 3:18 uses the word "fitting" which means she "fits." Adam needs someone who fits. Paul says it's good and FITTING...submission is rooted in "fitting" with the husband.

Gen 3:16 To the woman he said,

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labor you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.”

Childbirth is painful and a woman’s desire will be for her husband. This curse takes the **mutuality** and makes it a **hierarchy**. The husband now has “dominion” rule over his wife. But Paul says the wife is coming alongside to FIT with the husband, taking away jealousy.

It reverses the curse. Neither male or female: everyone is now level. Don’t embitter...don’t be jealous.

Children obey, Fathers do not embitter. In the Old Testament, we are told the fathers are turned against their children. But Paul says to turn your heart toward each other.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

When Paul says everything, it’s really not **everything**: Paul says to submit to the government BUT they don’t submit when the government tells them to stop preaching the gospel. If your parents tell you to lie or hurt someone, you don’t have to do those things. *It’s always in the context of the parents shaping the children into Christ.*

Masters: they aren’t really in charge because they have a master in heaven. Here in the U.S. today, we are all people of privilege: slaves made our cellphones. There’s not much we can do about this: but we can begin to examine our call to bring equity, freedom, and justice. Maybe it means I pray for them or make purchasing choices. We also have immediate power structures: if we are the person of power, we are to bring fairness and justice, freedom, and equity.

Vulnerability: submission is being vulnerable. Loving is being vulnerable, obeying is being vulnerable.

The Famous Theologian Russ Lewis

Vulnerability is the intentional placing of power into the hands of another, knowing that this gives them the power to have meaningful negative impact on the chooser; the choice is made for the sake of the blessing the other.

I love this definition by Russ Lewis: to submit to a husband is to bless them. You put yourself at risk when you love another person: it could end in disappointment and frustration. If a child obeys, they have an opportunity to be negatively impacted and frustrated. But there is also an opportunity to bless and further the kingdom. Likewise, when you obey your boss, it is possible to draw them closer to Jesus. If you have power, you might be taken advantage of but it will bless and draw people toward the kingdom of God .

When Paul builds the family code, he knows the Christian family will change the world because it will be top to bottom vulnerable: this is terrifying unless we know there is a reward from our King.

Questions:

When does abuse begin: In a broken world, we are surrounded by abuse?

Paul was surrounded by this: he is confident the gospel community can change a culture. I would say concerning women and submission, you cannot fit with someone who is abusive. In this case, submitting to them means stepping away from them: the wife submitting will not lead the husband to Jesus. This isn't done in a vacuum: this is done in community.