

## STUDY 6

# PUT ON CHRIST AT HOME & WORK

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1

If you've been around for a while, you'll know that western culture has been through massive change over the last fifty years or so. Prevailing ideas about gender, sexuality and the relationship between men and women have been through an overhaul. And Christianity - by and large - has been blamed for everything unfair, unjust, unloving and unreasonable that our world has left behind.

In some areas, 'Christendom' - our heritage of 'Christianised culture' without much actual Christianity - badly needed reform. Powerful religious interests, selfishness, privilege and power are a toxic mix. Often, the historic empowerment of "the church" to set and police social norms led to a rigid and unloving Pharisaism that would have horrified Jesus.

Other times, though, we're met with clear biblical teaching that seems so countercultural that we maybe wish it wasn't there. And if we don't look carefully, think wisely and apply graciously, we can end up with all kinds of problems.

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## REFRESH

1. **Look back to Colossians 3:12 and 3:15.** What qualities should characterise us as a Church family, and how do you imagine life in our 'home families' should compare with this?

2. According to 3:17, as Christians what should be the goal, motive and "vibe" of everything we do and say?

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## CHANGE AT HOME & WORK

**Read Colossians 3:18-4:1**

3. Reading 3:18 on its own, what dangers and objections surface in your mind?

4. Does reading 3:18 and 19 together as a package address any of these issues? Why, or why not?

Paul raises exactly the same points in his letter to the nearby Ephesians. (In fact, some scholars think Ephesians was the ‘circular letter’ Paul mentions in 4:16, where he tells the Colossians to make sure they read the letter he sent to a neighbouring church.) Paul expects all the churches to read one another’s mail!

In this case, Paul gives the Ephesians a little more detail.

5. **Read Ephesians 5:19-28** (see sidebar). What extra detail is given to husbands?
  
6. What do you think (in both Ephesians 5:21-22, and Colossians 3:18-19) Paul means by the idea of “*submission*”? In what way is this like Jesus? Likewise, in Colossians 3:19 (and Ephesians 5:25) what does “*love*” look like? (How is it like Jesus?)
  
7. How does the parenting model in **Colossians 3:20-21** contrast with much 21st century thinking?
  
8. If we take this model for marriage and family life on board, how will Christian families look different?

### ***Ephesians 5:19-28***

<sup>19</sup> ... Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ; <sup>22</sup> wives, to your own husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.

### ***Why Serve?***

This passage raises lots of questions. Why does Paul want husbands in particular to have authority and wives to submit? Why is Paul happy to allow slavery to continue? Why not just ban it from the start? Well, here’s a short answer. First, Christianity started small - there was no way such teaching could be imposed on the mighty Roman empire. But secondly, because Paul (continued over page...)

and the other apostles see the glory of Jesus most clearly demonstrated in *his* submission to suffering on the cross, they have a new and different view of the glory and dignity of *our* humility and service. Slaves, for example, have a new dignity - because Jesus himself stooped to washing the feet of his disciples. Wives have the huge privilege of showing the world how the church willingly submits to Jesus; and husbands have the privilege of showing what it means to lead by sacrificial service, like Jesus. Likewise, our church leaders are meant to be servants - which is what the word "minister" literally means. When James and John are pushing for pre-eminence in Mark 10, Jesus calls his disciples together and says, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you *must be your servant*, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

These days we have much more freedom and choice than slaves (and perhaps wives) in Paul's time. If you're being in some way abused by an employer or a spouse, you're entitled to step out of the firing line. In fact, if your safety or the safety of others is at risk, you *should* seek protection. But in other cases, there'll be opportunities to show exactly what Jesus is like, simply in the way we submit, obey and love. In short, we're all meant to be "flipping the script" on the way the world views authority and relationships to show the world something of Jesus. Sadly, 'the church' hasn't done a great job of this in the past. Are you prepared to give it a try?

9. Read the instructions for slaves and masters in 3:22-4:1. If Christian slaves and masters in the church took on this model, what would change? What can you take from this to your own workplace?

(\*"Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favouritism" seems to be a word of reassurance to slaves who are being mistreated by unfair masters. Paul's advice is, "God will deal with it in due time.")

10. Read **Colossians 3:18 to 4:1**, noting... "As is fitting in the Lord," "For this pleases the Lord," "with reverence for the Lord," "as working for the Lord," "an inheritance from the Lord," "it is the Lord Christ you are serving," "you also have a master in heaven." Summarise what Paul is saying about how our faith in Jesus should impact our daily lives and relationships, and how this should prevent the oppression of women, children and workers.

P.C.

## Loving with Servant Hearts - A word from the team

Hi guys. If you're reading this in the 21st century and you think Paul is saying it's okay for husbands to demean their wives and *make them submit*, or that it's somehow okay for you to be violent to your wife to *help her* submit, you've totally missed his point. Paul's saying that you're meant to figure out what it means **to be like Jesus towards your wife**... in sacrificial, serving love. How on earth did you ever turn that into an excuse for domestic abuse? And ladies... if you're thinking that the heart of what Paul's saying is outdated and irrelevant, and that the way forward is to insist on your rights and completely disregard any notion of 'submission'... you're missing the point too. Following Jesus for all of us is about **loving with servant hearts**. If you're a Christian feminist, you need to remember that first and foremost you're called to serve the Lord Christ, who loved you and gave himself for you - and make sure that's reflected in the way you live out your relationships. Either way, if your spouse is degrading and verbally or physically abusing you, ask for help, and make yourself safe. (If a husband is claiming to do that 'in the name of Christ', be aware that our church leadership thinks differently. Please ask for help.)

Phil, Jeremy, Pete, Doug, Dan, Matt, Jayesh, Bruce