



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS Colossians 3:17 – 4:1

Read Colossians 3:17 – 4:1 (and pray)

1. Following on from looking at the CHRISTian community as a whole, Paul now focuses on specific relationships within that community. **Briefly review verse 11-15 and name a few characteristics of the Christian community that apply to all relationships.**

Husbands and Wives

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? Why do you think Paul specifically tells husbands, 'and do not be harsh with them'?**

Parents and children

4. The Bible only requires one thing from children: that they obey their parents. **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'?**

Employer and employee relationships

5. In our godless society we are motivated to work either for money or for our own career advancement or for our own fulfilment. **What is our main motivation for work according to this passage? 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 will this look like?**

## Leaders Notes

Background: In our last sermon on Colossians 3:11-17 we focused on the CHRISTian community. In this passage Paul digs a bit deeper and deals with specific relationships within the church. That means that everything that is pertinent to the community as a whole still applies here. Here, Paul is just picking up a few specifics in particular relationships.

### Husbands and wives

2. 'As is fitting in the Lord' puts the Christian marriage relationship in a 'heavenly' framework (remember 3:1-4). Christian marriage is not about some relationship of love between two individuals only, with God as an added bonus or extra feature that they can take or leave. Christian marriage is about Christianity and about God. Christians who marry are entering into a relationship that is God-designed, God-shaped and God-directed. And, their marriage is primarily not for themselves but for God. Marriage is 'IN the Lord'. Therefore submission to the husband is submission to Jesus. It is really Christ you submit to when you submit to your husband. Marriage outside of Christianity can be arranged any way the couples see fit. In our society even same sex couples can marry. The best way a wife can learn to submit to her husband is to watch Jesus Christ as He relates to the Father. Christ obeyed the Father in everything and submitted to the Father's love for His Son. The gospel shapes the behaviour of both the husband and the wife. Practically this will look different in different cultures - hence the discussion. There are no specific rules in the Bible for what this looks like. For example in some cultures, for a wife not to wear head covering shows a lack of submission. Christians in Islamic cultures ought to wear the burka or hijab if this shows submission to their husbands. In our culture the discussion about what submission looks like is precisely that: a discussion. It may even look slightly different in different marriages. The point is submission, not rule keeping. The older women ought to lead by example and teach the younger women what this looks like.
3. Husbands love their wives as Jesus Christ loved the church and laid down His life for her. It is not the wife that dies for the husband but the husband who dies for his wife. Husbands lay down their lives for their wives in everything. Everything a husband does is for the good – not of himself – but his wife. Paul specifically mentions harshness because in our fallen nature we think authority means the "bonus" of ruling over someone or 'lording' it over someone or getting our own way. This is very far from true headship. Sinful husbands tend to criticize, interrupt, shout, argue or even use physical threats such as throwing things or breaking things (both of which are forms of physical abuse). The Bible calls for husbands to be like Jesus. Gentle, patient and kind. But still to exercise authority and headship over their wives.

### Parents and children

4. In our culture the parent is 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. This is because our goal for our children is not a successful life in this world. If our children gain the whole world but lose their own soul they will have lost everything. Our focus is on their spiritual lives and here, the best thing we can do for them is to teach them to obey God-instituted authority. This will lead them to understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ and when they grow up and make decisions for themselves, they won't be tempted to see Jesus as an add-on or a 'life coach' who is there to help them achieve their dreams and build their own kingdoms. Rather, they will see Jesus as He really is: the Lord of lords and they will joyfully obey Him in all things. Notice how the emphasis is on Fathers. In our culture very often lazy men leave discipline to mothers. This is different to what the Bible says. Don't 'provoke them' addresses Fathers who 'lord it over their children'. Children are still

children and they are allowed to be foolish and make bad decisions and experiment and have fun. Disciplining children so that you can have a more convenient lifestyle or for your own benefit is selfish. Parents should only discipline in matters of disobedience. It is wrong to punish a child because they thought it was a good idea to boil milk in the kettle unless you told them not to. Disobedience is punishable and little else is.

### Employers and employees

5. (BTW, slavery in the first century was far more akin to employer and employee relationships today. Slavery was a normal feature of the economy and people regularly sold themselves and redeemed themselves from slavery. Hence the Bible's relative lack of condemnation of slavery. We tend to think of slavery in its more modern terms such as the Atlantic slave trade which was an abhorrently evil practice that was racially based and is most certainly condemned by the Bible.) Christians work for Jesus Christ. This is back to 3:1-4 again. Our hearts and minds are set on Christ who is our life. When He appears we will get the promotion He has promised. Even now we are seated with Him next to the Father. Our reward is with Christ. If we fight hard and scheme our way to the top of this world and get all the recognition and reward we could possibly get in this life it would still make us infinitely poorer than if we just humbly submit to Christ and look forward to what He has promised. People who have really bad work situations ought to take heart that God will judge as it says in verse 26. There is no partiality with God – He is not afraid or intimidated by your boss or your vast multinational corporation.
6. The way to treat people under your authority or who look to you for their income is simply to look at Christ, your Master in heaven. How does He treat you? How often does He give you food and health and comforts such as the beach and sunshine? How harsh is He? He still expects to be obeyed but He is kind and always fair. In fact, as a recent book on leadership says, 'Good leaders eat last.' This is Christian leadership and should be the attitude of Christian employers.