

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians
Chapter Eighteen

Role Modeling Christianity through Relationships

“¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love *your* wives, and be not bitter against them. ²⁰ Children, obey *your* parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged. ²² Servants, obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: ²³ And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; ²⁴ Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. ¹ Masters, give unto *your* servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” (Colossians 3:18-4:1)

When Jesus is Lord of our relationships, those relationships fall under at least one (usually more) of four authorities. Yet, we must constantly remind ourselves that all of these relationships fall under the Lordship of Christ. We can never be submissive to our supreme Authority (Jesus) if we refuse to be submissive to any one of God’s other four ordained authorities.

In Colossians 3:18-25, we move from a general exhortation to specifics regarding these relationships. God wants us to understand that, although we are all positionally equal in Christ as believers, we still have individual responsibilities and functions in life. These are called ROLES. Each role has its own distinctions. Some of these roles are wives, husbands, children, fathers, mothers, “servants” (employees) and “masters” (employers).

The distinctions between these roles pertain to God’s commands regarding how each role relates to the other roles. The distinctions describe individual responsibilities to one another in various relationships. The believer who accepts the Lordship of Jesus over his life also accepts his responsibilities in these various relationships and submits to the Lord’s commands for each. “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21).

The first role given is too the wife (v 18). “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit (right) in the Lord.” The distinction “wife” refers to how she is to relate to her husband (not to anyone else). “Wife” describes the relationship. A wife is not a wife if she does not fulfill her distinction. The command (distinction) for her relationship to her husband is to “submit.”

The word “submit” is from the Greek word *hupotasso* (hoop-ot-as'-so). It means (1) to arrange under, to subordinate (2) to subject, put in subjection (3) to subject one’s self, obey (4) to submit to one’s control (5) to yield to one’s admonition or advice (6) to obey, be subject. It is a Greek military term meaning to arrange troop divisions in a military fashion under the command of a leader. In non-military use, it was a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.

The degree of a wife’s submission to her husband is the same degree expected of all believers as they submit to the Lord Jesus.

“²² Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴ Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Ephesians 5:22-24).

The wife does not submit to her husband because he is superior to her. She submits because Jesus is Lord and His command her to submit to her husband. The wife that fails to do what Jesus commands is living in sin.

What is the Lord’s purpose in commanding the wife to submit to her husband? A wife’s submission to her husband provides order in that relationship.

“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (I Corinthians 14:33).

Her voluntary submission to her husband is a role model for the voluntary submission of her children to the Lordship of Christ. In homes, where the wife is not submissive to the husband (in the Lord), the children’s understanding of submission to the Lordship of Christ is usually destroyed. This has been one of the greatest damages done by *Women’s Lib* to the family. Rebellion breeds more rebellion. In Colossians 3:18, the words “as it is fit in the Lord” emphasize a moral obligation. The wife should portray this voluntary position to her children and the world, because it is her moral obligation.

The second role given is the husband (v 19). “**Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.**” The distinction of the word “husband” refers to how he is to relate to his wife. “Husband” describes the relationship. A husband is not a husband if he does not fulfill his distinction. The husband has two commands (distinctions) for his relationship to his wife.

1. The first command is to “love” his wife. The word “love” is from the Greek word *agapao* (ag-ap-ah'-o). When used in regard to other people, it means to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, to love dearly. The responsibility attached to the word is that of self-sacrifice for the benefit of another.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25).

2. The second command is “be not bitter against them.” The word “bitter” is from the Greek word *pikraino* {pik-rah'-ee-no). It means to “(1) embitter, exasperate, (2) render angry, indignant, (3) to be embittered, irritated, (4) to visit with bitterness, to grieve (deal bitterly with).” The husband should not only be willing to make extreme sacrifices for his wife; he should also be tender and appreciative.

What is the Lord’s purpose in these two commands to the husband? These two commands teach what Jesus means by the word “love;” the willingness to give sacrificially of ourselves to other. They teach the need to be gentle with people. These two commands are some of the first things children need to learn. Before they learn to communicate verbally, these truths need to be continually role modeled before them. Therefore, the father in a home teaches his children how to love the Lord and others.

The third role given is the children (v 20). “**Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.**” The distinction “children” refers to how children are to relate to their parents (the husband and wife). The word “children” describes the relationship (not the age). The child’s command is “obey.” The word “obey” is from the Greek word *hupakouo* (hoop-ak-oo'-o). It means to “(1) to listen, to harken, (2) of one who on the knock at the door comes to listen who it is, (the duty of a porter), (3) to harken to a command, or (4) to obey, be obedient to, submit to.”

Children **learn** obedience. The first way they do so is through the role modeling of parents. In Ephesians 6:1-2, children are given a second command.

“¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. ² Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise).”

The word “honor” is from the Greek word *timao* (tim-ah'-o). It means “(1) to estimate, fix the value, (2) for the value of something belonging to one’s self, (3) to honour, to have in honour, to revere, venerate.” This means that the child is to evaluate the divinely appointed position of the authority of parents and treat them with reverence, courtesy, respect, and obedience. Obedience is the duty that finds its motivation in the proper Biblical evaluation of another person’s position (“honor”).

Why are children to be taught to obey and honor their parents? Children that are not taught these things regarding their parents will not know that they are responsible to obey and honor the Lord. Since children have difficulty understanding abstract concepts such as submission, obedience, honor and love to an invisible God, their training must be in concrete realities. When these are commands learned regarding parents in the physical world, they can applied spiritually to God while living in the physical world.

The fourth role given is for Christian employees (“servants,” vs 22-24). “²² Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: ²³ And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; ²⁴ Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

The distinction is how the employee relates to his employer. The command “obey” comes with definitive qualifications. “Obey” is from the same Greek word used for children in their relationship with their parents. There are some definitive qualifications of that obedience.

1. “Not with eyeservice;” this means obedience ought not to be something done for an outward show.
2. “Singleness of heart . . . as to the Lord;” obedience should be from the *heart* as if serving God the Father or the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “heart” refers to the motivation/attitude of obedience.
3. “Heartily;” Christians out to work with the same zeal and spirit they would give to the Lord.
4. “For ye serve the Lord Christ;” Christians should view everything they do as unto the Lord, not for men.

Why should the Christian employee serve in this way?

1. The Christian employee should be an example of the most loyal, humble, submissive and concerned person in the work force.
2. The Christian employee should live before the world as a person who recognizes his accountability to God in every avenue of his life.
3. The over ruling principle has already been stated in Colossians 3:17.

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

The fifth role given is for Christian employers (“masters,” 4:1). “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.” The distinction is how the employer relates to his employee. The command is to be “just and equal” with them.

The word “just” is from the Greek word *dikaios* (dik'-ah-yos). In this context it means rendering to each his due and that in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them.

The word “equal” is from the Greek word *isotes* (e-sot'-ace). It means (1) equality, or (2) equity, fairness, what is equitable.

Why should the Christian employer treat his employees justly and fairly? Because every Christian should publicly and privately exemplify these character traits by always dealing with people according to what is Biblically right. He should also always deal with people fairly. Man’s natural tendency is to make all decisions with prejudice towards those he favors and against those he disfavors. God wants equitability. God is not a respecter of persons.

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

God has defined these relationships to provide order to a fallen world. The Christian who has submitted to the Lordship of Christ will work in each of these relationships according to these role models as God defines them. How are you role modeling Christ in you marriage, family or work?

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1. Read Colossians 3:18. What is the first role given? _____
 - A. What does the distinction “wife” refer too? _____
 - B. What is the command that defines her distinction? _____
 - C. What do you think is the Lord’s purpose in commanding the wife to do this? _____

2. Read Colossians 3:19. What is the second role given? _____
 - A. What does the distinction “husband” refer too? _____
 - B. What are the two commands that define his distinction? _____
 - C. What do you think is the Lord’s purpose in commanding the husband to do this? _____

3. Read Colossians 3:20. What is the third role given? _____
 - A. What does the distinction “children” refer too? _____
 - B. What is the command that defines this distinction? _____
 - C. What do you think is the Lord’s purpose in commanding the child to do this? _____
 - D. How do children **learn** obedience? _____

4. Read Colossians 3:22-24. What is the fourth role given? _____
 - A. What does the distinction “servant” refer too? _____
 - B. What is the command that defines this distinction? _____
 - C. What do you think is the Lord’s purpose in commanding the “servant” to do this? _____
 - D. What verse in Colossians has already stated the overall governing principle for this role model? _____
 - E. Give the definitive qualifications of how the command is to be fulfilled? _____

5. Read Colossians 4:1. What is the fifth role given? _____
 - A. What does the distinction “master” refer too? _____
 - B. What two words define this distinction? _____
 - C. What do you think is the Lord’s purpose in commanding the “master” to do this? _____

Evaluate your roles in the various relationships that apply to you. Is there an area of your life that needs to be corrected to correspond with these roles? Define what needs to be done and set some goals to accomplish this. Begin by confessing your failure to others in these relationships to which you have been a poor role model. Until you fulfill your responsibilities in these relationships, you are living in sin.

“For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king” (I Samuel 15:23).