

Colossians 3:18-4:1. How do I change? Paul told the Colossians that change starts with knowing Christ. It involves replacing vices with virtues while the believer renews his mind with truth.

What does a life changed by Christ look like? A life of love, and a life of submission. A Christ-like person learns to love without making distinctions in race, education, and social status (Col 3:11). He also submits to the authorities God has established. Everyone has at least a handful of authorities—how well do you submit to them?

God created man as His own image to govern all the wonderful things He had created. The land, the seas, the animals—God placed everything under man’s authority that man would govern the world in ways pleasing to Him (Gen 1:26-28). Earth was to be as it is in Heaven, a place of love and joyful service to God. All was shattered when man went his own way. When Adam and Eve sinned, God saw the image of Himself doing as He would never do. Rather than being an image that reflects the glory of God back to the Creator, man rebelled.

Rebellion didn’t stop in Eden, but spread as a disease from the first couple to the first children (Rom 5:12). Cain murdered his brother and made himself an authority over others (Gen 4:8, 17). Lamech, his grandson, took multiple wives for himself and killed a man who challenged his authority (Gen 4:19, 23-24). Neither Cain nor Lamech had the rightful authority to do anything over anyone—why is that? Because only God gives authority. As Jesus so boldly said to Pilate, “You would have no authority... unless it had been given you from above” (Jn 19:11).

God is the source of all authority (Rom 13:1), and man has long rebelled against it. We may not shake our fist at God, but we tend to challenge anyone He places in a position of leadership: Parents? Employers? Political leaders? Teachers? Pastors? We tell ourselves that this is *my* life, *my* body, *my* kids, *my* church, *my* house, *my* country. *And who are you to tell me what to do!* Yet, God has said nothing is truly yours. All belongs to Him (Job 41:11). You and I aren’t owners of anything, are we? No, we’re just stewards given things to manage.

God’s Spirit produces submissive people. Submission isn’t weakness or inequality, and it doesn’t mean being a pushover. Submission is Jesus Christ who “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Rebellion is natural for us; submission isn’t. That’s why submission is a sure sign of God’s supernatural work in a believer’s life.

AT HOME

COLOSSIANS 3:18-21

“Marriage is just a piece of paper,” she retorted. Like the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well, she had been divorced and had swept through a string of boyfriends in its aftermath. I wish this were an isolated story, but it isn’t. Broken relationships with pain masked under a smile are all around us. Angry fathers, embittered mothers, rebellious children... fights, quarrels, threats, obscenities, violence, unfaithfulness. It’s life in a world alienated from God.

What does Scripture have to say about this? It says there’s hope. Paul reminded the Colossians that they have Christ (v. 3:1). They’ve been united with Him, connected to Him with all His life-changing power (Jn 15:1-7). They now needed to replace vices with virtues while saturating their minds with God’s Word (v. 3:5-13). He encouraged them to let the peace of Christ rule their lives, the Word of God dwell richly in their hearts, and the name of Christ shine in all they do (v. 3:14-17). Renew your mind with truth, and take heart that change is possible in a believer’s life and relationships. Anxiety and anger need not rule the home!

Colossians 3:14—“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Let’s start with the structure God designed for families. Husbands are charged to “love your wives.” Wives are exhorted to “submit to your husbands.” Children are told to obey their parents, and fathers are warned not to exasperate their kids (v. 3:18-21). If this seems a radical concept today, it was a radical concept then. Families have rarely resembled the love, submission, and obedience that the Son of God showed the Father.

What is love? The love exemplified by Christ seems best described as affectionate sacrifice. The world understands affection, and religion encourages sacrifice. The former views love as a powerful emotion. The latter views sacrifice as love’s proof. Yet, the love the Jesus showed is not one without the other (1 Cor 13:1-8). Love loves to give for the good of another.

Affectionate sacrifice was Paul’s ministry for the churches (1 Thes 2:8-9; Acts 20:17-38; 2 Cor 6:4-13), and Jesus’ heart for His disciples. It was on the night Jesus was betrayed that “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to very end” (Jn 13:1). Daily heartfelt sacrifice to the point of dying for His friends (Jn 15:13).

Christ and My Relationships

Paul urged husbands to love their wives “and do not be harsh with them” (Col 3:19). A more literal translation would be, “...and do not embitter them.” Don’t abuse your position. Husbands are to love their wives with the kind of affection and sacrifice Christ has shown to them. Love your wife as Christ has loved the church (Eph 5:25).

“REAL CHRISTIANITY IS BOTH A DOCTRINE AND A LIFE. MERE BELIEF IS DEAD WITHOUT LIFE AS PROOF... AND OUR DEALINGS WITH OTHERS BECOME THE FINAL PROOF OF OUR REAL CONNECTION WITH CHRIST”

— A. T. ROBERTSON.

To lead by love is God’s charge for husbands. For wives, “submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col 3:18). There’s no doubt verses like this have been wrongly used, but pause for a second: God didn’t design marriage to resemble a dictatorship. Submission doesn’t mean silence nor does it imply inequality. None of this is why God gave Eve to Adam. She was to be Adam’s helpmate that life together would be more for both than life apart (Gen 2:18). Adam would lead; Eve would cooperate with him that the two could pursue a goal greater than either one—God’s glory.

It’s been said we worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship of God. Priorities like these won’t lead to a blessed life or marital bliss. Husbands are called to sacrifice. They are to lead by example, elevating their wife and children as more important than themselves. Wives are called to cooperatively follow. When the two live like this, which is rare, marriage becomes a melody with harmony that resounds to the glory of God.

Colossians 3:20-21—“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

Submission isn’t a synonym for obedience. More than a willingness to cooperate, obedience means to listen and respond accordingly. God’s will for children is that they do as their parents ask. To what extent? “In everything.” And why? Because “this pleases the Lord.”

Authority is prone to abuse, isn’t it? Children are urged to obey, but parents do not have free reign to boss their kids around. Knowing fathers are often guilty of this, God says, “do not provoke your children.” Take great care not to embitter your kids. Comparing

them to others, showing little interest in their pursuits, doling out arbitrary consequences, or being heavy-handed are just a few of the ways that dads turn the hearts of their children against them.

AT WORK

COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

New life in Christ is more than walking an aisle, signing a card, or even being baptized. Inner change manifests itself on the outside. We’ve seen how Christ profoundly affects marriages and families. Having Him as Lord and Savior also affects business and commerce. How so? Because if you’re a Christians, work suddenly becomes much more than making money or reporting to an employer—“you are serving the Lord Christ” (Col 3:24b).

Colossians 3:23—“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”

Despite all the glory of the Roman Empire, we’re reminded in these verses that slavery was common (Col 3:22). As high as 2/3 of the population of the first-century empire was enslaved. Depending upon the master, it could be a cruel existence. Masters, in fact, had the legal authority to beat and kill their slaves.

What does this letter say to all those Christians who lived their lives as slaves? That God knows. Nothing good or bad escapes the eye of your loving Father. Paul gives hope by encouraging the suffering to look to their eternal home, “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward” (Col 3:24). Keep working hard. God hasn’t forgotten you. The Lord will reward you one day.

It seems some in the Colossian church owned slaves, and this letter warned slave-owners to realize “you also have a Master in Heaven” (Col 4:1). In other words, God knows and sees how you treat those who serve you. The whole letter of Philemon was actually written to a slave-owner whose slave had run away. Paul urged the slave-owner to receive the runaway back as a “dear brother” (Phil 1:16-17). The true gospel is antithetical to slavery.

No one likes authority, no matter where that authority exists. Yet, new life in Christ produces people who want to honor God at home and at work. They learn and grow in submitting. Paul urges us to look beyond this life, to lead, submit, and obey: “...as is fitting in the Lord... this pleases the Lord... as for the Lord... you are serving the Lord.” In other words, all of my roles and service in this life aren’t about *me* and *mine*, but about Him. All glory be to Christ.