

COLOSSIANS 3:18-25 | INSTRUCTIONS FOR RELATIONSHIPS

VERSE 18 – BLUE

Paul either begins a new segment (as I am taking it), or continues the previous segment concerning how we should live as those who are **complete in him** (Col. 1:10). Under either division, this segment concerns personal relationships within the home.

Beginning with **wives**, Paul instructs them to **submit** to their **husbands, as it is fit in the Lord**.

The word **submit** is ὑποτάσσω [hupotasso], meaning "under appointment." Since the fall, God has given a certain order to society that holds it together. There is nothing in Scripture that supports any kind of view of women as inferior, but everything in Scripture speaks of men as the head of the home.

Note that women are to submit **as it is fit in the Lord**. This adverbial clause tells *how* to submit, not *why* to submit. There can be views of submission which are *not fit in the Lord*, and these are not insisted upon here.

VERSE 19 – BLUE

This simple instruction to **husbands** is nine words in Greek, 10 in English, and is *almost* the totality of instruction for husbands found in Scripture. Being a husband is not something that is hard to do. Husbands are first to **love your wives**, a subject in which Paul *slightly* elaborates on in Ephesians 5:25-31, with the only addition of giving Christ's love for the church and a man's love for his own body as the comparative point.

The second instruction to men concerning wives is to **be not bitter against them**. Sometimes men, who have a longing for freedom, can become bitter to their wives who may, by necessity or by her demands, keep them from expressing this freedom. Love conquers any degree of bitterness, but where it is still a struggle, the husband is simply instructed to put the bitterness out of his life.

VERSE 20 – BLUE

Next, Paul speaks to **children**, using a word that does not give any definition as to age, but which almost certainly refers to children living in the home. The time comes when **a man leave his father and mother** (Eph. 5:28), thus it is almost untenable to argue that a child of any age is under this teaching.

Whereas the wife is to **submit...as it is fit in the Lord** (v. 18), the child is to **obey...in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord**. In a Biblical society that teaches verses 18-19, the all-inclusive statement of verse 20 is never dangerous.

VERSE 21 – BLUE

Now to the **Fathers** comes the instruction to **provoke not your children to anger**. Note the assumption Paul makes that the Fathers are the head of the home, and disciplinary matters ultimately belong to him.

The insertion of the words **to anger** is appropriate not only with the context, but with the word translated **provoke**, ἐρεθίζω [erethizo], which comes from the root *eris*, which means "contention, strive, wrangling" (see Strong's Enhanced Lexicon #2054). This insight makes an interesting question concerning 2 Corinthians 9:2, the only other place where the word is used. In that verse the Corinthian generosity **hath provoked very many**, making us wonder if the provocation was not so much to generosity but rather to anger.

When a father provokes a child, they could **be discouraged**. If children are provoked then they may become ἀθυμέω [athumeo], which is "without fierceness" or "without passion." This implicitly teaches that the Christian parent should

desire a certain fierceness within their children that allows them to eventually come to a boiling point. In fact, I would argue that the Christian parents of boy who gets in a fight should ask *why?* rather than declare *what!* There may indeed be a good reason for the brawl. A continual provocation of a child will remove the passion of that child.

VERSE 22 – BLUE

The final instruction is to **servants** and arguably this instruction stretches through verse 25 (see note on verse 23). The word δοῦλος [doulos] had a broad range of meaning and the American experience of slavery would reflect only a sliver of the meaning in Roman *doulos* society. It is estimated that 30-50% of Roman population would have been a *doulos* in some manner, including teachers, philosophers, accountants, physicians as well as laborers of all variety, and even gladiators and warriors.

These **servants** were instructed to **obey in all things your masters according to the flesh**. Though this was the same wording as given to children, Paul recognized that these were **masters according to the flesh**, thus implying the inherent value of **servants** as humans. The servant should serve *with gusto* rather than *only to look busy*.

VERSE 23 – BLUE

The punctuation of the KJV, continuing the sentence from verse 22 rather than beginning a new sentence, signifies the best interpretation, that verse 23 continues the thought of verse 22, and thus is chiefly directed toward **servants** (v. 22). The application could certainly be appropriate for anyone, but the instruction is for those who must serve another human being. Their service is to be **as to the Lord, and not unto men**.

VERSE 24 – BLUE

The servant is to rejoice that the Lord will provide him **the reward of the inheritance** because they **serve the Lord Christ**. It is highly questionable whether this **inheritance** be equated with the inheritance promised to Abraham, though the Bible does talk about that inheritance using the same language (see Gal. 3:18, for example). To make such a conclusion we would be forced to explain how good service to a master merits inclusion in the Abrahamic promises.

An option is to take the Greek word in its etymological meaning rather than its usage, which is typically a questionable argumentative avenue. The word κληρονομία [kleronomia] is literally *the lot of the law*. Thus, rather than understanding this as some kind of promised possession, it could be understood as saying that the Lord will make sure that good servants receive what the law (the Roman law) promises to them. Indeed, Roman law did have measures of protection for the *doulos* class.

In whatever way the verse is to be understood, there is certainly a promise of the Lord's watch-care over the servant.

VERSE 25 - BLUE

If taken in a spiritual rather than physical matter, this verse (along with 24) becomes a problematic works-based rewards system. While many in Christianity are comfortable with such a system, I think that it is incompatible with being complete in Christ, which has been the theme since chapter 1. If Christians are saved *from their sins* do those sins come back to haunt them in heaven? If, in heaven, a Christian will **receive the wrong which he hath done**, then is 2 Corinthians 5:19 not giving the truth when it speaks of God **not imputing their trespasses unto them**?

It seems best to take verses 24 and 25 in the context of the servants (as in v. 22), and look at both the **reward of the inheritance** and the **wrong which he hath done** as earthly rewards and recompense. Paul is, in this light, reminding the Colossians what he reminded the Galatians of in Galatians 6:7, that **God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap**.

Since with God **there is no respect of persons**, He is not slack to care for a *doulos* nor hesitant to punish a master (to whom the next verse will be addressed).