

**BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH**  
CNR THOMPSON & MARCUS RDS., LWR TEMPLESTOWE VIC 3107  
*"The Supremacy of Christ - Studies in Colossians"*  
Sunday, October 24, 2004 : Study 12 (Colossians 3 : 18 - 4 : 1)  
**"NEW PEOPLE, NEW RELATIONSHIPS"**

**Notes by Rev. Gary Lockyer**

**CONTEXT : Where are we in the Series?**

We are in the third section of Paul's Colossian letter : Col 3:1- 4:1 It's sub-structure is :

1. New People. Breaking With The Past : (3 : 1 - 11)
2. New People. New Values : (3 : 11 - 14)
3. New People. A New Unity : (3 : 15 - 17)
4. New People. New Relationships : (3 : 18 - 4 : 1)

————— Today's Study

**CONTEXT .. of the Passage in Colossians**

This third section of Paul's letter is a challenge to the Colossian Church to be the people that God had called them to be. Last week, in the 3rd. study in this section, we saw how the idea of "unity" ran through vs 15-17. In this Study, Paul's focus shifts from unity to the diversity of relationships that a Christian may have had in the ancient world - the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and between masters and slaves. To our ears, Paul's instructions sound conservative. In fact they were radical then and still present a challenge for us 2000 years later.

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Of the three types of relationships in 3:18-4:1, only that of parents and children remains largely unaltered from Paul's day to ours. Slavery has been abolished. With regard to the relationship between men and women in general, massive social change has taken place in and it continues to the present as women participate equally in Tertiary Education and in all areas of society.

This major redefinition of males / females roles has also impacted the marriage relationship. Gone is the traditional view of Marriage (once enshrined in law) that the male is the head of the home and that a wife finds her fulfilment within the home, obedient to her husband and subordinating her life to his and to their family's.

However no Christian today consistently believes in the relational structures of these verses - for no Christian (that I know of) believes that Slavery is of God and should be maintained. Some Christian sects attempt to maintain the marriage structure (eg. Exclusive Brethren), but find that they have to virtually shut themselves off from society and construct and enforce an ugly legalism in order for it to work.

FOUR APPROACHES to the Marriage Relationship from this passage :

1. Traditional - Paul's instructions are the timeless Word of God
2. Modified - Men and Women equal in society (to some degree) but traditional roles in the home.
3. Cultural - this is just Paul speaking from his limited knowledge; not God's Word.
4. Revolutionary - This is God's Word, designed to break down relational systems of abusive power in any culture and exchange them for a consistent Christian ethic - the position taken in this study.

**B. BIBLICAL SETTING of Male / Female / Marriage relationships**

**1. OVERALL THEOLOGY**

- a. EQUALITY in Creation (Gen1:27-28)
- b. SUBJUGATION a result of the Fall (Gen3:15-16)
- c. RESTORATION of equality as one result of redemption (Gal3:26-29 cf Col3:11)

**2. CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE PRINCIPLES : 1Cor7:2-4**

- a. EQUAL responsibility; no ownership or control of one partner over the other.
- b. MUTUAL obligation to serve the other and to be responsive to their needs.

### 3. PARALLEL PASSAGE IN Ephesians 5 :

Teaching here re the same sets of relationships is in the context of being "*filled with the Spirit*" (Eph5:18b); of which one of the evidences is the MUTUAL submission of all Christians to each other.(Eph5:21)

("Be subject" does not mean obey! In these passages children and slaves are called on to obey, not wives. It cannot mean "obey". If it did Eph5:21 would be a nonsense - a command for every Christian to "obey" each other - see definition of "submit" in "4" below)

### 4. THIS SPECIFIC PASSAGE

The context in Colossians 3: 12-14 is that every Christian is to "clothe themselves" with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. They are to express a unity based on bearing with each other and forgiving one another in love. (3:12-14)

As these are the PRIMARY standards of all relationships between all Christians,. Therefore no "rules" for the specific relationships in Col3:18-4:1 will be in CONFLICT with them.

## 3. THE "RESPONSIBILITIES LIST" in Colossians 3:18 - 4:1

Lists of duties in the ancient world to regulate the relationships of husband to wife, father to child, and master to slave were common. They addressed the "without rights" party in each relationship by simply listing what was expected. (Remember that these people had no legal status at all in the Roman world. The husband / father / master had absolute power - even over life itself)

Paul's "list of expectations" to the "without rights" parties does not vary from the norm. However Paul does depart from the norm by :

b. not openly confronting the cultural norms. He states the traditionally understood obligations but then MODIFIES them by refocussing the motivation to that of "*pleasing the Lord.*" (3:18b, 20b, & 22b)

c. he radically TRANSFORMS the expected behaviour & attitudes of the parties who in the Roman world held the power. Each set of instructions addresses the abuse of power by the dominant partner. This is unknown in such lists and is a radical departure from them. For a Christian, there can be no injustice, exploitation or mistreatment, but rather sacrificial love modelled on the love Christ displayed for his people. (eg Eph5:25).

The instructions to the "powerful" has within them the seed of destruction for the traditional shape of each relationship under discussion. (We will see how this works more fully in the "master / slave" relationship when we conclude our Studies in Colossians with a study on the Letter to Philemon in a few weeks time.)

## 4. SOME CONCLUSIONS

"*As is fitting in the Lord*", or similar phrase, is used 3 times in these verses. It is not a pious platitude to reinforce the prevailing social customs and "Christianise" them (eg, the continuation of slavery or a patriarchal society).

Paul's concern is that within a given social context, Christians act responsibly "before the Lord." His concern is not to give a timeless order for relationships, but to focus on the motivation behind the rules that govern a relationship at any time, in any culture. "Do all aspects of my relationship with this person measure up to the standard of Christ?" (See Paul's own motivation in 1Cor9:19-23)

There is a clear practical reason for "living quietly" where possible within a society : to "*make attractive the Gospel.*" (See 1Cor9:19-23; Titus 2:9, 3:1, 8; 1Ptr2:13-15, 3:1-2)

It is here that "mutual submission" fits - a timeless principle for every culture : To "submit" is to :

: want the other person's good and work for it : give priority to the other person's needs.

: live within the relationship without bitterness or keeping a tally to see when I have done enough.

Two question for us today ...

How should I live in my social situation and relationships to reflect my "new nature?" (Col3:9-14)

How should I live in them to "make attractive" the gospel? (See 1Cor9:19-23; Titus 2:9, 3:1, 8;

1Ptr2:13-15, 3:1-2)