

# Colossians 3

## Focus on Heaven Modify the Old Man; Put on the New Man Instructions for Various Demographic Groups

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### **Introduction:**

After having given four warnings in chapter 2, along with the solution to each potential danger, Paul spends the first part of chapter 3 exhorting the believers in Colossae to focus their attention toward heaven (vv. 1-4), to mortify *the old man* (vv. 5-9), and to put on *the new man* (vv. 10-17). Then, starting in verse 18 and continuing through verse 1 of chapter 4, Paul gives a series of instructions in love addressed to various demographic groups.

## **Focus on Heaven (vv. 1-4)**

### **(1) If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.**

Chapter 3 opens with the words, “If ye then . . .,” indicating that what Paul is about to say is linked thematically to what he had said in chapter 2, and in fact, follows logically from it. Paul had given the Colossian believers four warnings in chapter 2:

1. (2:4) And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.
2. (2:8) Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments {or, *elementary teachings*} of the world, and not after Christ.
3. (2:16) Let no man therefore judge you in food, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.
4. (2:18) Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels.

For each of these warnings, Paul gives the biblical solution —four *prescriptions* to avoid being *infected* by these errant teachings. Then, at the end of that chapter, he asked the rhetorical question, “Therefore, if you are truly dead with Christ from the *simplistic teachings* of the world, why are you subjecting yourselves to these artificial, man-made ordinances — don’t touch, don’t eat, don’t handle — as though you were still living in the world?” (2:20-22). He then concludes the chapter by explaining that this type of false worship, through asceticism and mysticism, were anything but honorable, and instead, only served to stroke the egos of its practitioners (2:23).

So now, to start off chapter 3, Paul builds upon the warnings and admonitions of chapter 2, beginning with the words, “If ye then be risen with Christ, . . .” In other words, Paul is saying that if you are truly born again, risen with Christ, then you should set aside those *worldly rudiments* — the artificial, man-made teachings — and instead seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God.

As Christians, we should pursue heavenly goals, not get bogged down in man-made religion. As followers of Christ, we should keep our eyes on Christ. It’s really difficult to follow someone if you’re not watching them!

### **(2) Set your affection<sup>(1)</sup> on things above, not on things on the earth.**

<sup>(1)</sup> {margin: or, *mind*}

Paul continues the thought in verse 2 by telling the believers in Colossae to set their affection (or their minds) on things above, and not on things here on earth. The words “Set your affection” are translated from a single Greek imperative [ $\phi\rho\nu\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$  (*phroneite*)] that means “Exercise your mind,” or “Direct your thinking,” or, as the New Living Translation (NLT) renders it, “Think about.” Paul wants us, as believers, to focus our minds on heavenly things, not on earthly things.

So, what exactly does that mean to “direct our thinking” toward things above? Paul obviously does not mean toward the moon, or stars, but toward heaven, and heavenly things. He is instructing them, and by extension us, to keep our thoughts focused on heaven, on God, and on Christ. Paul refers to it in 2 Corinthians as “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 *Corinthians* 10:5b).

You may have heard the expression, “He/she is too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good.” That’s actually the exact *opposite* of what Paul is teaching here. Paul wants us focused, almost exclusively, on the things of heaven, paying as little attention as possible to the things of earth. Now, obviously, there are certain earthly things we have to pay attention to — our job requirements, putting food on the table, fixing a broken vehicle, planning for retirement, etc. — but Paul would not have us focused on these things to the exclusion of everything else, a problem that tends to plague many of us.

**(3) For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, *who is our life*, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.**

The “For” at the end of verse 3 gives an explanation, or reason, for what Paul had just told them to do — to set their affection [or mind] on things above, not on things on the earth. Why were they to do this? Because they were “dead,” and their lives were “hid with Christ in God.” When Paul says that they were “dead,” he’s obviously not speaking literally; he’s referring to them having been formerly “dead in [their] sins,” and Christ having “quickened [them] together with Him” (2:13). Just six verses previous to this verse, he had referred to them being “dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world” (2:20); he now explains that *because* of this, and *because* their lives were “hid with Christ in God,” they should set their affection on things above.

The word “hid” [*Greek: κέκρυπται (kékruptai)*] means “hidden, or concealed (properly, by covering).” The mental picture Paul seems to be painting here is that our lives, along with Christ, have been “covered over with a tarp,” or stashed away in some secret location, like pirate treasure. He then explains in verse 4 that when Christ appears, we will also appear with Him in glory. The “tarp” will be removed, so to speak — the hidden treasure will be revealed.

So, what does Paul mean by all this? It seems to me that he is speaking of our “lives” in a more *complete* sense than the way we normally think of the word today. He’s not just referring to us being alive in the sense of our having breath a heartbeat; he’s speaking of the eternal life that belongs to every true believer — the eternal life that’s presently “stored away securely” with Christ. Think of it as a super-secure safe deposit box in heaven. Similar to a buried pirate treasure, that only he knows the location of, or like valuables stored in a safe deposit box, our *eternal life* is “hidden away” with Christ, which prevents anyone from coming along and stealing it. Then one day, when Christ “appears” in the clouds to gather His Church, we will also “appear with Him in glory”; our eternal lives — in our new, glorified, resurrected bodies — will also “appear,” and will then become a *reality*, rather than a *hope*.

## **Mortify the Old Man (vv. 5-9):**

### **Mortify Your Members – Internal Sins (vv. 5-7):**

**(5) Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:**

Here in verse 5, Paul instructs us to “Mortify [literally: *put to death*] our members which are upon the earth.” Now, that obviously does not mean that we should take steak knives to our arms and legs, or put a gun to our heads. When Paul speaks of our “members,” he is referring to our old, fleshly nature — our old habits and practices. We are to treat our old life as if it were dead to us. We are to “mortify,” or “put to death,” all of those sinful behaviors that we used to take pleasure in before our salvation. We are no longer controlled by those sins, and should no longer give in to their urges. The apostle Paul explained this best in Romans chapter 6:

**(6)** Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. **(7)** For he that is dead is freed from sin. ... **(11)** Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. **(12)** Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. **(13)** Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. **(14)** For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. [*Romans 6:6-7, 12-14*]

Notice that Paul is not writing to the Romans, instructing them on how to conduct themselves *in order that* they would be freed from sin, and *so that* sin would not have dominion over them — he states flat out, “he that is dead *is freed* from sin,” and “sin *shall not* have dominion over you.” The words rendered “is freed” in verse 7 of Romans 6 come from a Greek verb [*δεδικαίωται* (*dedikaiōtai*)] that literally means “justified,” and thus set free. This particular word is in a Greek verbal tense called the “perfect” tense, which refers to actions that have been completed (in old English, *perfect* meant *complete*). We would probably call it “past tense” today. Paul was not saying that we *would be* set free from sin, or that we *were being* set free from sin, but that, as those whose flesh had been “crucified with Christ,” we *had already been* set free from sin. Therefore, as he explained in Romans 6, sin will never again have dominion over us — we are no longer its slaves, obligated to comply with its urges.

After instructing them to mortify their members which were upon the earth, Paul lists 5 specific sins that we should no longer engage in as believers:

1. Fornication ..... *πορνείαν* (*porneían*) ..... any illicit sexual activity
2. Uncleanness ..... *ἀκαθαρσίαν* (*akatharsían*) ..... impurity, physical or moral
3. Inordinate affection ..... *πάθος* (*páthos*) ..... passions, lusts
4. Evil concupiscence ..... *ἐπιθυμίαν κακῆν* (*epithumían kakēn*) ..... evil longings or desires
5. Covetousness ..... *πλεονεξίαν* (*pleonexían*) ..... avarice, greed
- 5b. (which is idolatry) ..... *εἰδωλολατρεία* (*eidōlolatreía*) ..... literally: image worship

These five sins are, for the most part, *internal* in nature (as opposed to the *external* sins Paul lists in verses 8-9), in that their focus is *inward*, to satisfy *our own* passions. Those Paul lists in verses 8-9 are directed *outward*, toward others. You could also say that the behaviors Paul condemns here are more *sensual* in nature, as opposed to the more *verbal* sins of verses 8-9. Paul’s point is that these five things should no longer be a part of a Christian’s life, *period*. Paul gives a similar list of sinful attitudes and behaviors in Ephesians chapter 5, which we’ll discuss in the notes for verses 8-9.

**(6) For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:**

Paul now explains that because of the sinful practices listed in verse 5, god's wrath is coming on "the children of disobedience" {literally: "the sons of unbelief"}. In other words, God's wrath is going to be poured out on "the sons of unbelief" because of their sin.

I refer to this verse fairly often, along with its parallel passage in Ephesians 5, which states, "... for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (*Ephesians 5:6, cited on the following page*). The phrase "upon the children of disobedience" [*Greek: ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας (epi tous huiois tes apeitheias)*], which appears in both of these passages, literally translates as "upon the sons of unbelief." The word "disobedience" in both of these passages [*Greek: ἀπειθείας (apeitheias)*] means "disbelief," or "unbelief," and is especially used to refer to *obstinate* or *rebellious* disbelief, which is why it often gets translated as "disobedience." This Greek word is a derivative of the verb *πειθω* (*peithō*), which means "to convince," and is the root verb from which we get the word "faith" [*πίστις (pistis)*]. These two passages (*Colossians 3:6 and Ephesians 5:6*) state explicitly that God's wrath is coming down upon a particular group of people, whom Scripture refers to as the "sons of disbelief," or "sons of disobedience."

What does this mean for us? It means that God is not going to pour His wrath out upon His own children, the bride of Christ, but upon the unbelieving world. There are other passages in Scripture which also indicate that the Church is not destined to undergo God's wrath during the Tribulation Period, but has been delivered from it:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Romans 5:8-9           | <b>(8)</b> But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <b>(9)</b> Much more then, being now justified by his blood, <u>we shall be saved from wrath</u> through him.  |
| 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 | <b>(9)</b> For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; <b>(10)</b> And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which <u>delivered us from the wrath to come</u> .  |
| 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 | <b>(8)</b> But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. <b>(9)</b> For <u>God hath not appointed us to wrath</u> , but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, <b>(10)</b> Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. <b>(11)</b> <u>Wherefore comfort yourselves together</u> , and edify one another, even as also ye do. |
| Revelation 3:10        | <i>(Written to the church at Philadelphia)</i><br><b>(10)</b> <u>Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.</u>  |

*(See also: Luke 21:36, Ephesians 5:25-27.)*

Plus, Scripture states explicitly that the Tribulation Period is meant for the nation of Israel, not for believers (*Daniel 9:24, Jeremiah 30:7*).

**(7) In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.**

This is a key passage in this discussion of our old, sinful natures. Paul explains that, as believers in Christ, we also walked in these same sinful behaviors, back when we were still unbelievers. The key here is Paul's use of the past tense: we *used to* walk in these behaviors, *before* we became believers.

**Put off the Old Man – External Sins (vv. 8-9):**

**(8) But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. (9) Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;**

*But now ye also put off all these; ... (vv. 8–9a):*

Paul lists six sins here that, for the most part, are *external* in nature — in that they are directed outward, against others:

1. Anger .....	ὀργήν ( <i>orgḗn</i> ) .....	passions; esp. violent ones
2. Wrath .....	θυμόν ( <i>thumón</i> ) .....	heated anger, as if boiling over
3. Malice .....	κακίαν ( <i>kakían</i> ) .....	literally: “badness”; maliciousness
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4. Blasphemy .....	βλασφημίαν ( <i>blasphēmían</i> ) .....	the vilifying of another <sup>1</sup>
5. Filthy Communication .....	αἰσχρολογίαν ( <i>aischrologían</i> ) .....	vile conversation
6. Lying .....	ψεύδεσθε ( <i>pseudesthe</i> ) .....	speaking an untruth; lying

While the sins listed in verse 5 were *internal* in nature, directed toward satisfying *our own animalistic passions*, these 6 sins are *external* in nature, directed *against others*. Some might describe them as *verbal*, rather than *sensual*. The first three of these are similar, in that they involve *inner* attitudes of the heart directed *toward others*, while the last three involve *sins of the tongue* — the sinful attitudes of the heart boiling over and erupting like a volcano out of our mouths. When you combine the list of *internal* sins in verse 5 with this list of *external* sins in verses 8-9, you have a total of 11 sinful attitudes and behaviors that should no longer be a part of a Christian’s life.

Paul gives a similar list of behaviors that Christians should no longer be involved in in Ephesians chapter 5:

**(1)** Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; **(2)** And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. **(3)** But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, **let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints**; **(4)** Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. **(5)** For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. **(6)** Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience {*literally: sons of unbelief*}. **(7) Be not ye therefore partakers with them.** **(8)** For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: **(9)** (For the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) **(10)** Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. **(11)** And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. **(12)** For **it is a shame even to speak of those things** which are done of them in secret. [*Ephesians 5:1-12 (emphasis added)*]

In this list from Ephesians 5, Paul includes a few sins that aren’t specifically mentioned here in Colossians:

1. Filthiness .....	αἰσχροτήτης ( <i>aischrótēs</i> ) .....	shamefulness; i.e., obscenity
2. Foolish talking .....	μωρολογία ( <i>mōrología</i> ) .....	silly talk; i.e., buffoonery
3. Jesting .....	εὐτραπελία ( <i>eutrapelía</i> ) .....	witticism; (esp., vulgar humor)
4. Whoremonger .....	πόρνος ( <i>pórnos</i> ) .....	literally: a male prostitute (a slightly different form of the word “fornication” from verse 5)

( ↓ Continued ↓ )

<sup>1</sup> The noun “blasphemy” [βλασφημία (*blasphēmía*)] comes from the adjective “βλάσφημος” (*bláspheмос*), which is a compound word formed by adding two Greek words together [βλάπτω (*bláptō*) = *to harm or injure*, + φήμη (*phēmē*) = *a common saying, or rumor; literally: “fame”*]. Put together, it literally means “hurtful rumor,” or “harmful saying.”

In this list from Ephesians 5, the terms *unclean person*, *covetous man*, and *idolater* are simply different forms of the words *uncleanness*, *covetousness*, and *idolatry* in verse 5 of this chapter. What's interesting about the passage from Ephesians 5 is that Paul unequivocally states that these attitudes and behavior should be "not once named among you, as becometh saints" (*Ephesians 5:3*), and that "it is a shame even to speak of those things" (*Ephesians 5:12*). If, for some bizarre reason, you think it's okay for a believer to live this way, you apparently haven't read Paul's writings, because he's pretty blunt about the fact that it's not okay, and even shameful.

... seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds: (v. 9b):

Notice how, at the end of verse 9, Paul mentions their having "put off the old man with his deeds" as if it were past tense, something they had already done. These attitudes and behaviors are *shameful*, and *not to be named among believers*, because as believers, we should have *already* "put off the old man with his deeds." In Paul's epistle to the Romans, he said that "our old man 'is crucified' [*past tense*] with *him* [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (*Romans 6:6*).

Paul said in Galatians that the former Pharisee and persecutor of the Church had been "crucified with Christ," and that the man Paul was now was actually "Christ living in [him]":

**(20) I am crucified with Christ**: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. [*Galatians 2:20*].

We should "put off" the old man, along with his sinful "deeds," and no longer be enslaved to it. Paul goes on in the next verse to explain that in place of the *old man*, we should have put on the *new man* ....

## **Put on the New Man (vv. 10-17):**

### **Description of the New Man (vv. 10-11):**

**(10) And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:**

*And have put on the new [man], ... (v. 10a):*

This is a continuation of the sentence begun in verse 8. After having “put off” our *old man*, we should already have “put on” the *new man*. Notice that this too is past tense (*aorist participle* in Greek — “having put on”); this is something that should *already* have been done. Paul writes to these Colossian believers as if they had *already put off* the old man, and had *already put on* the new man. And, as we discussed in the introduction to Colossians, there’s a chance that Paul has never even met these people. I personally don’t view the putting off of the old man, and the putting on of the new man as a repeated action that believers are to do every day, throughout their Christian lives, but as a once-for-all-time event that was supposed to have occurred the moment we accept Christ as our Savior and are “born again.” The problem for most of us is that, having put off the old man, we keep reaching into our spiritual closet and putting him back on again! Paul’s exhortation in the parallel passage in Ephesians 4 reads this way:

**(22)** [And this I say therefore ... (from v. 17)] That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; **(23)** And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; **(24)** And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. [*Ephesians 4:24*]

While the passage here in Colossians is written as a simple matter-of-fact statement of something that had already been done in the past, the parallel passage in Ephesians is written as an exhortation for them to do something in the present. Like too many Christians today, the believers in Ephesus were apparently fond of taking off the new man, as if taking off their Sunday suits, and putting on the “sweats” of the old man for the rest of the week.

*... which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (v. 10b):*

This “new man” that we are to “have put on” is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.” The word “renewed” [*Greek: ἀνακαινούμενον (anakinouómenon)*] is a *present participle*, and is translated in most modern Bible versions as “is being renewed.” How is it being “renewed”? In knowledge. The new man is being “made new” in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him” [*i.e., after the image of God*]. The new man is being molded, like a lump of clay, into the very image of God.

In the parallel passage in Ephesians 4, cited above, Paul, referring to our new man, says, “... which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” In other words, the new man within each born-again believer is created by God Himself in righteousness and true holiness. The apostle John, in his first epistle, probably explained it best:

**(9)** Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [*1 John 3:9*]

**(18)** We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. [*1 John 5:18*]

While Paul is fond of using the expression “the new man,” John simply refers to that new life created within a believer as he is “born of God.” In the first passage quoted above (*1 John 3:9*), John is explaining that our new man (“he that is born of God”) “doth not commit sin.” And just to avoid any potential confusion, he adds the explanation that “His [*i.e., God’s*] seed remaineth in him [*i.e., in the believer*].” Then, at the end of the verse, John makes an incredible statement that must not be overlooked; he states that he that is born of God cannot sin, because he is born of God.” The only way this particular passage makes any sense whatsoever is to understand that when John refers to “he that is born of God,” he’s not referring to the believer *as a whole*, but to that which has been created *within* each true believer — what the apostle Paul refers to as the “new man.” This is made clear by John’s statement at the end of the verse that “he *cannot* sin, because he is born of God.” In other words, the new man within each true believer was created by God Himself, and is *incapable* of sin. ( ↓ *Continued* ↓ )



In the second of the two passages cited above, John once again reiterates that “whosoever is born of God sinneth not”; but then at the end of the verse he adds the interesting remark that “that wicked one toucheth him not” — that Satan doesn’t touch him at all. Now, anyone who’s been a Christian for any length of time understands full well that, as believers, Satan does in fact “touch” us, and fairly often at that. In fact, we are often engaged in hand-to-hand combat, so to speak, with him and his demons. Once again, the only way this passage makes any real sense is to understand that when John says “whosoever is born of God,” he is referring to the new man within each believer.

Note: Most modern Bible versions translate the two above passages from 1 John as *continuing, ongoing* actions, and essentially neuter them of any real meaning for the Christian. For example, they render the first phrase of both passages as “Whosoever is born of God does not continue in sin.” I used to take their word for it, until I studied the subject further. In both of the above passages, the underlying Greek verbs are not in the simple *present* tense, which can often represent an ongoing or continuous action, but instead are in the *present indicative* tense, a tense which is used to indicate a simple action in the present, not a continuing, or ongoing action. The reason, in my opinion, that these two passages are translated this way in the modern Bible versions is that this is an attempt by the translators to make sense of a passage which, on the surface, sounds like a contradiction with everyday Christian experience. As believers, we all sin from time to time. Thus, to claim that a born-again believer *never commits sin* sounds like an untenable contradiction. What these modern translators are not realizing is that John, like Paul, is referring to the new man.

Even if you translate these two passages in 1 John as ongoing, continuous verbal actions, you are still faced with a big problem. The end of 1 John 3:9 makes the statement that he that is born of God “cannot sin, because he is born of God.” Even if this is translated as a continuous, ongoing verbal action — “cannot continue in sin ...” — you are still left with a seemingly untenable contradiction, because we all know from personal experience that some Christians do in fact continue in sin from time to time, sometimes for very long periods (e.g., drinking, smoking, fornication, etc.). So, are we to conclude that they are not real Christians? If a Christian cannot *continue* in sin, how long do we stipulate continue to mean? Is it a month? Is it a year? You can see how this type of translation effectively neuters these two passages of any real meaning for the Christian.

**(11) Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.**

In Christ, there is no more distinction between the Jew and the Gentile, between those who are circumcised and those who are not, between Barbarians and Scythians, or between slaves and those who are free. Elsewhere in Paul’s epistles, he says:

**(13)** For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. [*1 Corinthians 12:13*]

**(28)** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. [*Galatians 3:28*]

So, from the Galatians passage above, we can add “male and female” to Paul’s list of things which no longer from distinctions between believers in the eyes of Christ. Paul sums it up at the end of the verse by stating that, for the believer, Christ *is* all and Christ is *in* all. In other words, Christ *is everything* to the believer, and He is *in* every believer. For this reason, those things which formally differentiated people, often in terms of social status or privilege, no longer matter to Christ — He looks at every believer equally.

By the same token, we also should no longer differentiate among our fellow believers based on these *external or physical* factors. We are all one in Christ, and we should treat our brothers and sisters in Christ accordingly. We should *emulate Christ* in this area.

**Attributes of the New Man (vv. 12-17):**

**(12) Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; (13) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel<sup>[2]</sup> against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do ye*.**

<sup>[2]</sup> {margin: or, *complaint*}

The “therefore” at the beginning of verse 12 links back to verses 9 and 10, where Paul had said, “... seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (vv. 9b–10). She now tells them to “Put on *therefore*...”

- Bowels of mercies ..... Bowels<sup>2</sup> of: compassion, pity, mercy
- Kindness ..... Moral goodness, integrity, kindness
- Humbleness of mind ..... Humility of mind, humbleness, modesty
- Meekness ..... Gentleness, mildness, meekness
- Long-suffering ..... Patient endurance, perseverance, long-suffering

We are to “put on” these attributes as if we are putting on our shirt in the morning. Most of us probably would not walk outside in the morning without a shirt. Likewise, we should not go out into the world without wearing our Christian “clothes.” These “clothes” should theoretically be something we “put on” once for all time, at the moment we are saved. The reality, however, is that because we are mortal human beings, living in a sin-cursed body, these are things we have to put on anew each morning. God’s mercy and compassion “are new every morning” (*Lamentations* 3:22-23); we should renew ours each morning as well.

Many of the modern Bible versions render the last word of verse 12 as “patience.” I’m not fond of this translation, as it doesn’t sufficiently convey the true meaning of the underlying word. *Patience* has to do with our *situation*, while *long-suffering* has to do with the *people* around us. For example, patience is what we (hopefully) exhibit when our scheduled doctor appointment runs 45 minutes late. Long-suffering, on the other hand, which literally means “to suffer long,” is what we need to exhibit when people wrong us, or offend us, or belittle us, or in some other way tear us down. We are to “suffer long” with them, not getting angry or offended, but trying to be understanding. Oftentimes, the offense was unintentional, and could have simply been a misunderstanding. Plus, we don’t always know what the other person is going through.

Paul then adds that we are to *forbear* and *forgive* one another while doing so. Both of these words are present participles, and indicate a continuous, ongoing action. He even has the clarification, “... if any man have a quarrel [or *complaint*] against any [i.e., anyone else].” To “forbear” means to “put up with,” or to “bear with.” Several of the modern Bible versions (CSB, ESV, NASB, NET, WEB) render it as “Bearing with one another.” The New Living Translation (NLT) renders it as, “Make allowance for each other’s faults.” Knowing that, as believers, we are still sinners, let’s “bear with” one another in these situations, rather than getting upset.

When it comes to forbearing and forgiving one another, Paul adds the caveat, “... if any man have a quarrel against any [other].” As discussed in the previous paragraph, the forbearing and forgiving that Paul is urging here really come into play when we have complaints against one another — when we feel like we’ve been slighted or wronged.

At the end of verse 13, Paul explains the reason why we are to do all of this forbearing and forgiving: “even as Christ for gave you, so also *do ye*.” In other words, Christ forgave us (and for much worse), and we should therefore forgive others as well. How can we accept Christ’s forgiveness, and not forgive others who have wronged us? Peter had asked Jesus how often we need to forgive people when they offend us, and Jesus answered him this way:

**(21) Then came Peter to him, and said, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” (22) Jesus saith unto him, “I say not unto thee, ‘Until seven times’: but, ‘Until seventy times seven.’” [Matthew 18:21-22]**

( ↓ *Continued* ↓ )

<sup>2</sup> The “bowels,” or intestines, were considered by the Hebrews to be the place where one’s most tender emotions emanated from, the same way we consider the heart to be the center of our emotions today.

Jesus actually told a parable illustrating this very point. He described “a certain king which would take account of his servants” (*Matthew 18:23*). One servant in particular, who owed him 10,000 talents, pleaded with his master, and his master had compassion on him, and forgave him his debt. However, that servant then went to everyone who owed him money (much lesser amounts in fact), and beat them until they paid him back. When his master heard about it, he was not happy!

**(34) And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.**  
[*Matthew 18:34*]

At the end of that parable, Jesus had some pretty harsh words that we would be wise to heed:

**(35) So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.** [*Matthew 18:35*]

Jesus didn't mean that those who failed to forgive would be sent to hell, particularly when we're talking about Christians. But God has a way of making what goes around come around. How would you feel if you had to pay your car off within the next week, or lose it? Or if your mortgage company suddenly demanded full payment? If you're not willing to forgive others when they wrong you, watch out! God has an uncanny way of making our own harsh treatment of others come back to bite us.

**(14) And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.**

After having told them to “put on” all of those attributes listed in verse 12 — bowls of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and long-suffering — Paul now tells them to *most of all* “put on” *charity* [Greek: ἀγάπη (*agápē*)], which he explains is the “bond of perfectness” [i.e., the *glue* of spiritual wholeness, or spiritual maturity]. Agape love — selfless, undeserved, unconditional love toward others — is the capstone that holds everything else together. It is the glue that bonds us together as Christian brothers and sisters. And to exhibit true agape love toward our brothers and sisters in Christ is the pinnacle of spiritual maturity.

Jesus told his disciples that love was the one attribute by which other people would know that we are Christians:

**(34)** “A new commandment I give unto you, ‘That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.’ **(35)** By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” [John 13:34-35]

**(12)** “This is my commandment, ‘That ye love one another, as I have loved you.’” [John 15:12]

**(17)** “These things I command you, that ye love one another.” [John 15:17]

The apostle John, who initially recorded the above statements of Christ, in his first epistle, sums up this brotherly love nicely:

**(7)** Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. **(8)** He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. **(9)** In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. **(10)** Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **(11)** Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. [1 John 4:7-11]

The apostle Peter, in explaining how to grow as a Christian, lists a series of character traits that we should work at adding to our faith, and tops the list off with “charity” (agape love):

**(5)** And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; **(6)** And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; **(7)** And to godliness brotherly kindness [Greek: φιλαδελφία (*philadelphía*) = *brotherly love*]; and to brotherly kindness charity [*agape love*]. **(8)** For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren<sup>{4}</sup> nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **(9)** But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. [2 Peter 1:5-9]

<sup>{4}</sup> {Greek: idle}

True *agape love* is a step above *brotherly love*, and is something we should strive to perfect throughout our lives.

**(15) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.**

After telling them all the things they were to “put on,” ending with “charity” above all else (vv. 12-14), Paul now gives them three additional exhortations in verses 15-17:

1. Let the peace of God rule in your hearts ... and be ye thankful (v. 15).
2. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another (v. 16).
3. Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 17).

In verse 15 he urges them to allow the peace of God to rule in their hearts. He even explains that we are *called* to do so. Jesus told his disciples that he was leaving them with His peace:

**(27) Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.** [John 14:27]

**(33) These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.** [John 16:33]

Probably the most well-known passage about *the peace of God* is found in Philippians chapter 4:

**(6) Be careful** [i.e., anxious] **for nothing**; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. **(7) And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.** [Philippians 4:6-7]

In fact, on five separate occasions in the New Testament, God is referred to as “the God of peace” (*Romans 15:33; Romans 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20*). On the day of Christ’s birth, the heavenly host praised God, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” Christ brought peace to a world of chaos, hatred, and conflict.

In the parallel passage in Ephesians chapter 4, Paul urges them to put on of these same attributes, implying that doing so is to “walk worthy of the vocation [literally: the calling] with which we have been called”:

**(1) I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation** [literally: the calling] **wherewith ye are called,** **(2) With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;** **(3) Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** [Ephesians 4:1-3]

In other words, if we want to live a life *worthy* of Christ’s calling, we need to be wearing this Christian clothing. Notice how, here in Colossians, Paul refers to *agape love* as “the bond of perfectness,” while in the Ephesians passage above, he refers to “the bond of peace.” These two things — *agape love*, and the peace of God — bind us together as believers into a unified whole. Paul began every single letter he wrote by wishing *grace* and *peace* to his readers. These are two things we could all use an extra helping of.

**(16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.**

After putting on all of these attributes (vv. 12-13), topping off the list with *charity*, or *agape love* (v. 14), and allowing the peace of God to rule in our hearts, and being ever thankful (v. 15), Paul now adds that we are to “Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, in all wisdom.”

**(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.**

Verse 17 could be paraphrased as, “Everything we say, and everything we do, should all be *in the name of* the Lord Jesus, always giving thanks to the Father by him.” What does it mean to say something, or do something, *in the name of* Jesus? To speak or act in someone’s name means to speak or act *on their behalf*. The US ambassador to the United Nations speaks and acts *in the name of* the US government — *on behalf of* the US government. A Representative in Congress speaks *in the name of* his constituents — *on their behalf*. Everything we say as believers, and everything we do in this life, should be said and done *on His behalf*, as if Jesus Himself had asked us to say or do it.

And, of course, all the while giving thanks to God the Father. Scripture speaks often about having an attitude of thanksgiving, regardless of your circumstances:

**(6)** As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him: **(7)** Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein [*i.e., in the Faith*] with thanksgiving. [*Colossians 2:6-7*]

**(18)** And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; **(19)** Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; **(20)** Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; [*Ephesians 5:18-20*]

**(18)** In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. [*1 Thessalonians 5:18*]

**(15)** By him [*Christ*] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name. [*Hebrews 13:15*]

Interestingly, some variant of the word “thanks” (thanks, thankful, thanksgiving) occurs 6 times in this four-chapter epistle, and 32 times overall in the 13 Pauline epistles. It was obviously an important topic for Paul, and should be for us as well.

It’s usually pretty easy to be thankful when you are being blessed, or when life is going great; but how many of us are truly thankful when things aren’t going well? Even when life is throwing us curve balls, how often do we remember to thank God for our families, our homes, our jobs, our cars, etc.?

### **Instructions in Love for Various Demographic Groups (vv. 18-25):**

This section of the epistle actually continues through the first verse of chapter 4; why this chapter was split after verse 25 is a complete mystery. I will include notes for Colossians 4:1 at the end of this section, in order to maintain continuity, as well as in the notes for chapter 4. Paul covers six separate demographic groups in this section, arranged in three groups of two; within each grouping, there is a close relationship between the two:

- |                |           |
|----------------|-----------|
| 1 (a) Wives    | (3:18)    |
| 1 (b) Husbands | (3:19)    |
| 2 (a) Children | (3:20)    |
| 2 (b) Fathers  | (3:21)    |
| 3 (a) Servants | (3:22-25) |
| 3 (b) Masters  | (4:1)     |

In this section, there are a total of seven imperative verbs:

- |                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| 1. Submit        | (v. 18) |
| 2. Love          | (v. 19) |
| 3. Be not bitter | (v. 19) |
| 4. Obey          | (v. 20) |
| 5. Provoke not   | (v. 21) |
| 6. Obey          | (v. 22) |
| 7. Do            | (v. 23) |
| 8. Give          | (4:1)   |

These aren't suggestions by Paul ... they are commands! You'll notice that two of these six groups have two command verbs, rather than just one. Husbands are to both "love," their wives, and "be not bitter" against them; servants are to both "obey" their masters, as well as "do" everything they do "as to the Lord, and not to men."

Let's look closer at each one of these demographic groups:

## 1. **Wives & Husbands (vv. 18-19):**

### A. **Wives (v. 18):**

#### **(18) Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.**

Wives are to submit themselves willingly to their husbands, not because they are inferior, but because it is God's design, or as Paul puts it, "as is fit in the Lord"— i.e., as is *fitting, proper, or appropriate* in the Lord. God created man first; then he created woman to be "an help meet for him" (*Genesis 2:18*). The phrase "an help meet for him" in this passage [*Hebrew: עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (ēzer K'neg'Dō)*] translates literally as, "a help 'as the front [or opposite] of him,'" — i.e., 'as his counterpart' (or 'as his opposite')." Today, we might say "as his flip-side." The idea is that the woman was to be the "other half" of the man — that which was lacking in order to make 'Man' complete.

Peter, in his first epistle, also wrote about the relationship between husband and wives:

**(1)** Likewise, ye wives, *be* in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; **(2)** While they behold your chaste conversation *coupled* with fear. **(3)** Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; **(4)** But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. **(5)** For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: **(6)** Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. [*1 Peter 3:1-6*]

Paul, in the parallel passage in Ephesians, explains:

**(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*]

Paul goes on to explain, later in that same chapter:

**(33)** Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband. [*Ephesians 5:33*]

Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, explains the real reason why women are to submit to their husbands:

**(11)** Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. **(12)** But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. **(13)** For Adam was first formed, then Eve. **(14)** And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. [*1 Timothy 2:11-14*]

( ↓ Continued ↓ )



What exactly is Paul saying there? He is giving two separate Scriptural reasons why women are to be in submission to men, and specifically to their husbands:

1. God created man *first, then* woman.
  - Because man was created first, he has the preeminence — he was the *firstborn*, as it were, as such, is entitled to all of the rights and respect due the firstborn.
2. Eve, not Adam, was the one deceived in the garden.
  - In the Garden of Eden, Adam was not deceived by Satan; he sinned willingly — he knew full well what he was doing. That’s why Paul calls it “Adam’s transgression” in Romans 5:14; Adam was the one held responsible for the transgression. Eve, on the other hand, was completely duped — she was fooled by the serpent’s slick talk, and his appeal to the three lures of the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (*1 John 2:16*).
  - So, in addition to being the second one created, and therefore automatically in a subordinate role, the woman is also not to be in a position of authority over the man, particularly in spiritual matters, because she was more easily deceived. God created woman to be a loving, caring, nurturing, comforting, highly emotional being — all of those things man was not nearly as good at, but which are necessary to complete him. As a much more emotional being, woman is more naturally susceptible to being led by her heart, a thing which Scripture tells “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (*Jeremiah 17:9*).

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God cursed the ground, bringing forth thorns and thistles, and decreed that man would have hard work all of his days (*Genesis 3:17-20*). To the woman, God said, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (*Genesis 3:16*). The phrase “thy desire shall be to thy husband” most likely means that she would want to *control* her husband, but God decreed that she would forever be in submission to him. There is some debate among scholars regarding the noun “desire” [*Hebrew: תְּשׁוּקָה (teshûwqâh)*] in *Genesis 3:16*; it only appears two other times in Scripture, once in *Song of Solomon 7:10* (“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me”), and once in *Genesis 4:7*. In fact, in the *Genesis 4:7* passage, it is used in an almost identical way as in *Genesis 3:16*, where sin is personified as if crouching at the door, waiting for an opportunity to *have control over* Cain:

**(6)** And the LORD said unto Cain, “Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? **(7)** If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” [*Genesis 4:6-7*]

Plus, it’s hard to imagine that part of the “curse” would be the woman’s attraction to her husband — I’m sure that was already present. Nor could it refer to her desire to *have* a husband, since Eve already had a husband prior to the curse, and I am sure she was happy she did. If there was no desire for males and females to be with one another prior to the curse, life on earth might never have multiplied.

The notion going around today that there is no such thing as *biological gender* is utterly ridiculous. It’s so insanely ludicrous but you might think the world is punking you, if it weren’t actually happening for real. God defined marriage in *Genesis 2*:

**(18)** And the LORD God said, “*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*”<sup>[9]</sup> ... **(21)** And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; **(22)** And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. **(23)** And Adam said, “This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called ‘Woman’ [Heb. *ishah*], because she was taken out of ‘Man’ [Heb. *ish*]. **(24)** Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. [*Genesis 2:18-24*]

[9] {Literally: *as opposite him*; i.e., *as his counterpart*}

C. **Husbands (v. 19):**

**(19) Husbands, love *your* wives, and be not bitter against them.**

In the second half of the husband-wife relationship, Paul tells husbands to love their wives, and not to be bitter against them. The word “love” used here [*Greek: ἀγαπάω (agapāō)*] is selfless, “*agape*” love, not the sexual love [*ἔρως (érōs)*] you might expect. It’s the kind of selfless, unconditional love that a mother, for example, feels toward her children. It is not dependent on whether you are loved in return, or treated with respect.

Paul, in the parallel passage in Ephesians, explains this in much more depth:

**(25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;**  
**(26) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (28) So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. (29) For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: (30) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. (31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (33) Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband. [*Ephesians 5:25-33*]**

Paul is explaining that a husband’s love for his wife should be the same love is that which Christ has for his Church. Husband should love their wives so much that they would give up everything for them.

Peter, in his first epistle, adds some additional insight into the relationship of husbands toward their wives:

**(7) Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them [their wives]* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. [*1 Peter 3:7*]**

Peter is telling the husbands to live with their wives “according to knowledge” — in other words, in accordance with the Truth of Scripture. In Romans 10:2, Paul states that the Jews were truly zealous for God, but “*not according to knowledge,*” or “*not according to the truth,*” meaning that their zeal for God was *in ignorance*. There are two ways a person can go astray in his pursuit of religion:

1. He can be passionate without knowledge, or
2. He can be knowledgeable without passion.

Both are bad, but it is arguably much worse to be passionate without proper knowledge. Muslims are undeniably passionate about their Faith, but their passion is “not according to knowledge” — not in line with the truth. On the flip-side, there are people who have extensive knowledge about the Bible, but have no fire for Jesus inside. One can be completely lost in their sin, and yet have a great deal of knowledge about the Bible.

He then goes on to tell them to give honor to the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being joint heirs of the grace of life. To put it another way, the wife deserves the honor of her husband for two reasons:

1. She is the “weaker vessel” and
2. She is a joint heir, together with the husband, of the grace of life.

( ↓ *Continued* ↓ )

When Peter speaks of the “weaker vessel,” he’s not talking of being weaker mentally, or emotionally — he is speaking of being weaker physically. While it is true that there are some women that are incredibly strong, it is a general rule that men are the stronger sex. This is why it is utter lunacy for men to pretend they are women in order to compete in women’s sports. As a general rule, men are rugged, tough, strong, and comparatively unemotional. Women, on the other hand, are precious, dainty things that deserve the husband’s care, protection, and love.

Peter then adds, at the end of the above verse, that husbands should treat their wives this way so that “[their] prayers be not hindered.” Not giving the proper honor and respect to your wife can create an obstacle between you and God, such that it hinders your prayer life. Don’t expect God to answer your prayers if you’re mistreating or belittling your wife.

### 3. **Children & Fathers (vv. 20-21):**

#### A. **Children (v. 20):**

##### **(20) Children, obey *your* parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.**

Following wives and husbands, the next demographic group Paul addresses is children and fathers. He begins with children, and *commands* them to “obey [*their*] parents in all things,” and adds that “this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”

When the Lord gave the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, the first four of these Commandments dealt with our attitudes and responsibilities toward God, while the last six addressed our attitudes toward our fellow man. The very first command in this 2<sup>nd</sup> group was to “Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” [*Exodus 20:12*]. It even came before the command, “Thou shall not kill” [*20:13*]. I submit that because God put this commandment first, it is really important! In fact, here in Colossians, Paul says that for children to obey their parents in all things is “well pleasing” to the Lord — it is *very pleasing* to Him.

Now, most of us here today are no longer children; so does this still apply to us? Yes it does! Again, going back to the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment cited above, the honoring of one’s father and mother had no age limit attached to it — it applied for life. Even here in Colossians, there doesn’t appear to be an age limit attached — it simply refers to *children* and *parents*. If you happen to be 40 years old, aren’t you still the child of your parents? Of course you are.

The word “children” used here [*Greek: τέκνα (tékna)*] doesn’t specifically refer to young, minor children, but to offspring in general. In fact, the majority of times that this word appears in the New Testament, it is referring to adult children. For example, Jesus used this word to address the man sick with palsy, whom his friends and family had let down through the roof, and the apostle Paul refers to Timothy using the same word. Another Greek word, *παιδία (paidía)*, refers specifically to young children still under the tutelage of their parents. The related word, *παιδαγωγός (paidagōgós)*, is used in the book of Galatians to refer to the Old Testament as a “schoolmaster” [*instructor of young children*] to lead people to Christ.

Now obviously, if you’re an adult, with your own household to tend to, you are no longer under the supervision of your parents (unless you’re still living in their house). As such, we can’t always “obey” Our parents in everything. But I submit that we should strive to do our best to obey them, even as adults.

How much does the expression “all things” entail? What if a parent tells their child to do something bad (lie, cheat, or steal)? Over the years, it has not been uncommon for the Roma people (or Romani) to train up their children specifically to steal and pickpocket. What’s a young child to do in a situation like this? My opinion is that very young children are not accountable to the Lord for actions their parents tell them to do, and they should obey their parents, even if what they’re told to do is wrong. The question becomes a little stickier once the child grows older — old enough to know right from wrong. What then?

**B. Fathers (v. 21):**

**(21) Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged.**

The flip-side of the command for children to *obey* their parents is the command for fathers not to *provoke* their children. The words “to anger” are not in the original Greek text, but are implied. The verb translated “provoke” [Greek: ἐρεθίζετε (*erethidzete*)] means “to stir up, excite, stimulate, or provoke,” and Strong’s Greek lexicon adds the caveat, “especially to anger.” The same word for “children” [τέκνα (*tékna*)] is used here as in verse 20.

What this means is that fathers should not taunt their children, or tease them, or ridicule them, or deliberate do things that would make them frustrated or angry. For example, it would not be right for a father to provoke his child to anger, and then turn around and punish him for that outburst. Fathers should encourage their children, giving them support and reassurance as they train them to be godly adults.

Unfortunately, sometimes a father has to be the disciplinarian. No good father enjoys this, and the old saying, “This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you,” certainly applies in these cases. But even when we have to discipline our children, we should do it lovingly, explaining why they are being punished, and reassuring them afterwards that we love them dearly.

#### 4. **Servants & Masters (3:22 – 4:1):**

Next up comes servants and masters. When the Bible speaks of *servants* and *masters*, it's easy to think that this no longer applies today, since most of us have never been slaves or servants, and have never owned slaves or had servants. But in the strictest sense, a *servant* is anyone who *serves* another, while a *master* is anyone in a position of *authority* over others. So today, we can apply these same teachings to employees and bosses.

##### A. **Servants (vv. 22-25):**

**(22) Servants, obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:**

Just like the command for children, Paul tells servants to obey their masters in all things, but as the caveat, “according to the flesh.” The structure of the Greek sentence reads “Servants obey in all things according to the flesh your masters.” In other words, servants are to obey their masters in all fleshly, or carnal things. The idea is that, when it comes to things of this world, we are to obey our masters, or bosses. Another way of expressing this is that this command does not extend to spiritual things. We should obey our worldly bosses in physical things, and obey Christ in spiritual things.

At the end of this verse, Paul adds the explanation regarding a servants obedience, “not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.” Today, we would probably use the expression “lip service,” instead of “eye service,” but the meaning is the same. In other words don't obey your boss just for show, or just to look good in front of others, or only when others are around, but obey them “in singleness of heart, fearing God.” The word “singleness” means *sincerity*, and is usually translated that way in modern Bible versions. The idea is that we should be genuine, honest, and sincere in all of our interactions with our bosses, regardless of whether we like what we're told to do, or not. In the parallel passage in Ephesians, Paul says it this way:

**(5) Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; **(6) Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart**; **(7) With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men**; **(8) Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether *he be* bond or free.** [*Ephesians 6:5-8*]**

So, as Christians, we are to serve our bosses as if we are serving Christ Himself, doing the will of God from the heart. In other words, in serving our bosses faithfully and genuinely, we are doing the will of God, and we should do so wholeheartedly, as Paul explains in the following verses.

**(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.**

Paul continues with servants in verse 23 by telling them that whatever they do, they should do it *wholeheartedly*, as if they were doing it for the Lord, and not for a man. In the context here, Paul is referring to things that servants do at the direction of their masters. When your boss tells you to do something, put everything you've got into it, doing it wholeheartedly, as if the Jesus Himself had asked you to do it. That can sometimes be difficult to do, especially if your boss is not a particularly good boss. Nonetheless, as followers of Christ, we should obey our bosses as if they were Christ, at least when it comes to physical things.

In verse 24 Paul explains that we obey our bosses as if we are obeying Christ himself, *because* we know that it is Christ who will ultimately reward us for that obedience, not our earthly bosses. That reward Paul describes as “the reward of the inheritance,” referring to the inheritance that awaits Christians in the next life. At the end of the verse Paul explains that it is really Christ Himself that we are serving, even when we are serving our boss here on earth. By being good, faithful servants to our earthly bosses, we are faithfully serving Christ — it's what He wants us to do.

**(25) But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.**

Paul adds the caveat in verse 25 that a servant that does wrong to his master will receive the just reward for such wrongdoing. The parallel passage in Ephesians 6 (*cited on the previous page*) says it this way:

**(8)** Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether *he be bond or free.* [*Ephesians 6:8*]

The context here seems to imply that it is the Lord which will recompense this wrongdoing, even if your boss doesn't notice it. You may get away with things with your earthly boss, but you cannot escape the watchful eye of our Lord, who has “no respect of persons” — He treats the wealthy just like the poor, and the powerful just like the weak.

#### ***B. Masters (4:1):***

The final verse of this section is verse 1 of chapter 4. This is one of those unfortunate chapter breaks that leaves you scratching your head and asking, “Why?”

**(1) Masters, give unto *your* servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.**

Paul had just explained how Christians who were servants or ultimately serving their Lord Jesus Christ. By the same token, Paul now explains that masters were to treat their servants with equity and fairness, because their Master in heaven is Jesus, and that's what He would have them to do. So even if a Christian is the CEO of a company, or the president of a nation, he has a Master over him as well, and that Master is Christ. Bosses should deal with their employees in a way that is fair and just, in a way that would be pleasing to Christ, who is their ultimate boss.