

All of Life is All for Christ

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Let's go to the Lord for help. Lord, we ask for your help as we seek to hear you in your word. Now, Ancilla was sitting in the great hall of the house of Master Philemon in Colossae, way back in the hall with all the other slaves.

Now, the church had gathered to listen to a letter from Apostle Paul, a letter delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus.

Now, she was deep in her own thoughts as she waited for the reader to start. Ah, Onesimus, that rascal, runaway slave, became a Christian, who would have imagined?

And he actually came back to Colossae. How foolish! His master Philemon had not decided what to do with him.

Rumors have it that there was a letter for Master Philemon too. Ancilla thought of her husband and her two children.

[1 : 39] They belonged to Master Nicias. Now, she was a teacher to Master Nicias' children. Her slave husband was the household doctor.

Half the population of the empire were slaves. And she had just heard that old Alexander, an estate manager of another household, was simply thrown out and left to die in the streets.

That's my lord in life, she sighed. My master holds my life in his hands. He is the lord of his house. Even his wife covers before him. He will one day decide who his children marry. When the boys grow up, they too will be told how to rule their home.

Ancilla fears for the master's eldest son, who is turning out to be a rebel. She hopes the master doesn't sell him off as a slave.

[2 : 51] Or in a feat of rage, kill him. But things have been changing in her household. Her master and his wife had become Christians under the preaching of Epaphras.

Many of their slaves also believed, including Ancilla and her husband. Dynamics in the house were a little strange since then.

Has the master become more patient? Gentler even? The loud voice of the reader jolted her from her thoughts.

She heard, wives! We have come to a section of Paul's letter, which is called the Household Codes. Instructions listing the responsibilities of each member of the family, including those working for the household. At that time, slaves.

[3 : 57] Now, some people will find this passage objectionable. Calling it outdated. Insulting to women. And should be ignored.

Others accuse Paul of giving legitimacy to slavery. Why didn't Paul just instruct the masters to free the slave? In this day and age, the call for the wife to submit to her husband sounds outlandish.

And it is difficult to square this passage with Paul's own declaration that in Colossians 3.11, in God's new society, there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free.

And in Galatians 3.28, no male or female. But Christ is all and in all. So in Christ, everyone is of equal value, equally loved, equally indwelt by Him, and co-heirs with Him, united in a new family of God.

Man-enacted social hierarchies have been demolished. So how should we approach this passage?

[5 : 21] Firstly, to avoid misinterpretation and misapplication of this passage, it is important to examine not only what Paul said, but what he did not say.

We must also take each set of instructions together. So, the instruction to the wife and husband must be read together as one.

If you separate them, you open the door to abuse. So too the child and parent, or the slave and master couplets. What Paul wrote in 3.1-17, which we examined last week, is key to keeping the household instructions in their context.

Now, God has forgiven us all our sins by Jesus redeeming death on the cross. On the cross, He has also crucified our old self.

And so Paul wrote, Get rid of things that belong to that old self. Things like sexual immorality, lust, covetousness, anger, rage, malice, slander, lying, and filthy language.

[6 : 42] Christ has given each one of us a new self, which is being renewed in His image. And so Paul wrote, Put on the things that belong to your new self, like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and above all, love.

And finally he wrote in verse 17, And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

And then he begins, Wives. Now, think about it. Family and work, think about it in your own life. Family and work probably takes up 80% of your time. So this is where we are going to show the evidence of our new lives in Christ.

In the ordinary, mundane, everyday life of families and work. Here is where the rubber meets the road. And this is where most of the whatever you do of verse 17 happens.

[8 : 02] Paul shows us here the essential blueprints, the very basic but important responsibilities that a Christ-centered family and workspace should follow for the new life of Christ to flourish.

But first, let's take a zoom out view of this passage. We can see that every member of the family has a responsibility towards one another.

Okay? If you just scan through the passage. But can you spot who is it that we are ultimately responsible to? Yes.

Jesus. Verse 18. The wife and husband, as is fitting in the Lord. Verse 20. Children and parents, this pleases the Lord.

Slave and masters, out of reverence for the Lord, as working for the Lord. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. You have a master in heaven.

[9 : 17] So, how could any man reading this passage imagine that he is the Lord of his little domestic empire? And because it is Christ we serve, we are to carry out our responsibility irrespective of whether the other members do the same.

For example, the husband is to love the wife whether or not his wife shows the level of submission he expects. Because, he is not serving his wife, he is serving Christ.

So, also, any submission, love, or obedience are expressions of one's own obedience to Christ.

The man of the house is never instructed to force anyone to submit to him or to obey him. We will see that God's blueprint for families and work space is not based on power struggles or of personal gains.

It is always looking out for the welfare of the other persons and centered on the Lordship of Christ. Whether you are married or single, parenting or not, in authority or under it, this passage has something for you.

[10 : 50] Every relationship is an opportunity to express the grace, humility, and love of Christ. Firstly, verse 18 to 19, a Christ-centered marriage.

Wife, submit yourself to your husbands as fitting in the law. Now, remember, this is a command that is completely domestic.

It is not, it does not extend to men-women relationship outside of the individual marriage. So, women in general are not called to submit to all men.

Only to the husband in a marriage. And also, it means that it does not matter their status outside the home. Even if the wife earns more or if she is in a higher management level than the husband or from a more prominent family, it does not matter.

In a marriage, the Lord has said that her husband is her head in Ephesians 5.23. And God has given him the responsibility to lead.

[12 : 11] So, out of devotion to the Lord, her wife yields herself to respect and honor the loving leadership of her husband for one reason only, because it is fitting in the Lord.

Not because the husband is superior or anything like that. She is equal to the husband in the Lord. She cannot be forced or coerced to do so by another person.

In-law and not the husband definitely. The Greek word submit implies a voluntary and willing act.

She submits herself. Note that Paul doesn't use the word obey. He doesn't use the word obey for wives as he does for children and slaves.

And husbands are to love their wives. The Greek word for love here is a self-sacrificing, self-giving love. The way Christ loves the church.

[13 : 27] Husbands are to faithfully protect her, put her welfare and her needs first. Paul acknowledges in 1 Corinthians 7.33 that the husband will be looking out for ways to please their wives.

And this would mean considering her desires, her wishes and her dreams. So look again at what this love looks like in chapter 3 verse 12 14.

It is marked by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, and forbearance, and forgiveness.

If you love your wife, if you love like that, how can you be harsh with her? Verse 19, husbands are not to be harsh with them, or in other translations, to be bitter towards them.

That is not fitting in the Lord. And her submission is to the Lord first. So, she is not called to submit herself to evil, sin, immorality, or mistreatment, or to anything unethical, illegal, or that violates her conscience.

[14 : 56] She is definitely, she definitely did not submit herself to be humiliated, diminished, to blind obedience, cruelty, violence, or abuse.

she submitted herself to a loving leader, a husband who has been charged to lead in the Lord, ensuring the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of his family.

And she too, because she is now a new person in the Lord, will love and support her husband in the same way. And even if life wears you down, as life always can, or if your unrealistic expectations are not met, it is easy to feel bitterness towards her, or her towards you.

Do not let bitterness settle and fester in your hearts. It will surely, slowly erode your love for one another. Forgive and rediscover love instead.

So, how would you evaluate your responsibility towards the health of your marriage? I didn't say evaluate your spouse, yeah?

[16 : 24] I asked you to evaluate your own part in the marriage. And I am grateful for a forgiving wife, and turn daily to the Lord to ask to love as he does.

What about you? may our marriages reflect the gospel and be marked by self-giving and not selfishness. Secondly, Christ-centered parenting, verses 20 to 21.

Of what age group of children is Paul addressing? Now, most commentators agree that they are children who are still dependent and under the responsibility and protection of their parents.

They, too, have a God-given responsibility in the family. Verse 20, children are called to obey their parents in everything.

And to obey implies having very little choice in the matter. It carries the idea of both hearing one's parents and heeding their wishes.

[17 : 36] And this pleases the Lord. Now, children must obey their parents because God has given parents the stewardship to ensure they grow up in a safe environment, to mature intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, to become godly people who know right from wrong, to raise them up in the knowledge of the Lord, so that one day they will know God's love and grace and Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and to be able to live independently as adults.

Now, these goals become elusive if children are not compliant to their parents' guidance. So, parents need to set boundaries to keep their children from harm, set goals to encourage them towards maturity and independence.

In other words, parents must discipline their children in the Lord. Obedience in everything assumes that their parents are followers of Jesus, that they have their best interests at heart, and will not ask them to do anything that will not please the Lord.

Paul issues a caution. We have to watch ourselves when we parent or discipline. Paul tells fathers in verse 21, do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged.

Paul addresses the father in particular because in the first century, he is the one who yields absolute authority. Paul worries that parents would yield their authority in such a way that it will discourage or break the child.

[19 : 36] A discouraged child may say this, I am never good enough. Nothing I do ever satisfies them.

is ever good enough, so why bother?

The style of parenting that promotes this resignation is one where parents embitter their children. The word to embitter is also translated exasperate, provoke, aggravate, or antagonize.

So this could be a pattern of speech or action that belittles, barate, nag, frustrate them, purposely provoking them to anger or annoyance.

We can also exasperate them if we constantly change our expectation of them. Or if our discipline is inconsistent and wishy-washy.

[21 : 05] Today can, tomorrow cannot, next day can again. Again. Or it could be having unreasonable and unrealistic expectations, being extremely strict, being overly harsh in our punishment, playing favoritism, constantly comparing them with others, relentless criticism, inadequate praise, giving petty and pointless commands.

All this can embitter them. Instead, our parenting style should embody the virtues of the new self. of Colossians 3, 12-14 again, marked by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, forbearing with your children, and forgiving them as the Lord forgave you.

Our discipline should be primarily formative, rather than punitive. punishment should be moderate and measured, and must never be dispensed in anger.

Disciplining children does not give parents the license to abuse them physically, emotionally, or by way of neglect. Ultimately, we want to point our children to the Lord.

[22 : 44] We do not want children who obey just to avoid punishment. we want them to obey, knowing that it pleases the Lord. We want them to know the rules, that the rules that we set down are really good for them, and why?

We want them to respond to the Lord's love through us, so that they will in turn love, trust, and desire to please Him. So we encourage them, we affirm them, we praise them, we appreciate them, we love deeply and truly, not just with empty words.

Remember that the Lord loved us even while we were and are disobedient children. So let's not tell a child, you are disobedient, mommy and daddy don't love you anymore.

But rather, you have been disobedient, you must be punished, but mommy and daddy will always love you. to quote a commentator, the parent's duty is to live out the gospel to the child, that is, to assure their children that they are loved and accepted and valued for who they are, not who they ought to be, should have been or might become.

Obedience must never be made the condition for parental love. When a child is old enough, agree democratically on the family rules, boundaries and penalties.

[24 : 22] This provides them with security and space for self-exploration, self-expression and the growth of individual personalities within the boundaries set and agreed upon.

Expect accountability from them. Guide them and encourage them to choose to do what is right, to be self-disciplined and to exercise self-control.

Teach them and model for them the love and virtues of the new self in Christ. And when we get things wrong as we often do, we must be quick to confess and apologize for them.

As a father, I wish I had done things differently. Perhaps you feel the same way. So, I think we are thankful that God and our children are forgiving.

And for those of you who still have children under your roof, let what pleases the Lord be your blueprint. Lastly, the Christ-centered workspaces, verses 22-4.

[25 : 38] 1. Now, Paul addresses the household slaves like Ancilla. Thank God, we do not work in similar circumstances.

We are not slaves, nor are we slave owners. While these instructions do not speak directly to us, the theological principles laid down are very much applicable to everyone.

Let me just say here that what Paul wrote here, as well as in other letters, together with other writings of the New Testament, laid the framework that would lead to the emancipation of slaves and finally end slavery as an institution.

here are examples. Colossians 3.11 again. Here, there is no Gentile or Jew, slave or free, but Christ is all in all.

1 Corinthians 7. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you, although, if you can gain your freedom, do so.

[26 : 51] for the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord, is the Lord's freed person. Similarly, the one who is free and is called Christ's slave.

You were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of human beings. But in this passage, Paul is concerned with how individuals live out their new life in Christ in the circumstances they find themselves in.

So here, there are slaves who are still under bondage and they are masters. In the Colossian church, Philemon, the slave owner, now looks at Onesimus, the slave, and thinks, my brother, and he scratches his head.

How is this going to affect the slave master relationship? How will they obey the command in whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus?

So, Paul says this, he tells slaves, obey their earthly masters in everything. Verse 22, not only must they obey, their attitude must be right.

[28 : 26] They must not be like others who will only work or pretend to work when their masters are watching, hoping to carry favor from them. No, they are to work with sincerity of heart.

Verse 23, they are to put their full effort in whatever they do, working at it with all their hearts. Hmm, how are they ever going to do that?

They feel oppressed, they feel injustice. Well, by working as if they were working for the Lord, not human masters.

They work out of reverence for the Lord. they have a change of master. In Christ, their lowly servitude has been transformed into something noble.

Their work has taken on an eternal significance because it is the Lord Christ they serve. This Lord sees everything, every time.

[29 : 41] There's not a moment when his eyes are not on them. The Lord knows the injustice and the hardship they face. And in verse 24, while they will probably never ever inherit anything from their earthly masters estate, they have the certainty that they will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward for the works that they do for their faithful labor to him on earth.

And one day, they will hear these words that they so long to hear but may never hear from their human masters. What a joyful day when they hear these words from the Lord.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's happiness. The non-Christian slave obeys his master in everything because he doesn't have a choice.

The Christian slave will also obey his master in everything but he obeys with a liberated heart and a different motive.

And his service will be of a different standard, not eye service or people pleasing but from the heart. He is now serving Christ.

[31 : 13] Paul also issues a warning in verse 25. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs. There will be no favoritism.

And even though slaves face so much injustice, this doesn't exclude them from any wrongdoing. No favoritism. not for the slave, not for the master.

So, 4.1, masters, provide your slave with what is right and fair because you know that you also have a master in heaven.

A Christian slave owner now has to look at himself through his new status in Christ. While he is a free man, he now belongs to Christ.

he is Christ's slave. He has a master in heaven who shows no favoritism. While the prevailing culture tells him that whatever is done to slaves is not injustice because they are just things, living tools, now he knows that is not true.

[32 : 27] Like him, there are also people precious to Jesus who died for them as he did for him. And if they are Christians, then they are now his brothers and sisters.

So Paul tells them, provide your slave with what is right and fair. Or literally, provide justice and fairness to your slaves.

slaves. What would justice and fairness look like for slaves? It would certainly mean not to be punished harshly or unfairly, not to be abused physically, sexually, or emotionally.

professionally. It would mean having enough of both healthy food and clean water, getting adequate rest, having the necessary tools for work, ensuring their families are also provided for, and when they are old and frail, not simply discarded.

Perhaps the master could even love them as Jesus does with compassion, kindness, and patience, and with forgiveness. Or perhaps, the master should start paying them for work done.

[33 : 49] Such provisions would come at a great cost to Christian slave owners. Their non-Christian peers, even close friends, might shun them. What could these masters be thinking? Has this new religion driven them mad? Justice and fairness for slaves? Seriously? So, how can we apply what we just read to our work environment today?

Unless you are self-employed, retired, or in a one-man establishment, you will be working with other people.

Perhaps, you are the owner of a business, the director of a company, a manager, a supervisor, or a lower-level employee. But, whatever your position, remember that you have a boss in heaven. And we should do our work sincerely and diligently, as if we are serving the Lord, and not human bosses. We should also not be the person who works to be noticed by the boss, to carry favor from them.

[35 : 10] We work well, whether our bosses are looking at us or not. We will do good work, even if he doesn't notice us, appreciate our work, or give us his validation.

The validation that we treasure is from the Lord. We must be satisfied at the end of the day that we have done our best for the Lord.

That would also mean that we will not agree to do anything illegal, or immoral, or unethical. That may cost us our promotions, or even our jobs.

But haven't we said goodbye to the old self? And if we are in a toxic work environment, for example, the boss is abusive, we are free to change jobs or departments if we can.

Didn't Paul tell slaves who could gain their freedom to do so? And to work as if working for the Lord would also mean not to make work your idol.

[36 : 25] Don't be the workaholic who neglects his spouse, his children, his own physical, mental, and spiritual health. And if you are the owner or an employee with subordinates below you, remember to treat your employees or your subordinates with justice and fairness.

This may be seen in personal courtesy, in fair remunerations, in fair work assessment, fair working hours, proper rest, adequate leave, a safe work environment, and a work culture that says no to abuse or harassment.

Remember that they should not be working for you 24-7. Children, they have a life away from work, they have families, spouse and children and parents to care for and spend time with, and they need their own downtime for the recovery of their mental health.

And you may even go a little further and take an interest in their career development, in their families, their hopes and their dreams. This caring attitude might mean more headaches for you, but you will know your heavenly master's pleasure.

So, brothers and sisters in the Lord, your old self has been crucified with Christ. You are a new creation in him. God asks us to put on the new self that is being renewed in the image of its creator.

[38 : 10] Now, this new self will show up in how we speak to our spouse, how we discipline our children, how we treat employees and how we respond to our bosses.

So, this passage reminds each of us again of our responsibility towards one another and to renew our commitments to our families and to the Lord and to go to him for strength, wisdom, humility and grace.

So, in whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. And work at it with all your heart as doing it for the Lord, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

It is Christ we are serving. All of life is indeed all for Christ. Let's pray. Lord, you are our master in heaven.

Whatever we do in the family, at work, may we do it to your honor. Enable us to be obedient to you as we look forward with hope to the inheritance you have kept for us.

[39 : 28] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.