

Colossians 3:18-4:1 – Love in the Family

Chapter 3 and verses 1 through 17 included exhortations that were for the whole church at Colossae. The rest of the chapter along with 4:1 include exhortations to specific groups. The exhortations were mostly to family members; wives, husbands, children and fathers. The longest exhortation was directed to slaves / bond-servants. The section ends with instructions to masters.

Read Colossians 3:18-21.

What was Paul's exhortation to wives? What reason was given for this exhortation? Was the reason based on the cultural or social norms of Colossae? Is this exhortation still applicable for today? How do most people in the United States answer this question? (3:18)

What were Paul's exhortations to husbands? For the second part of verse 19, ESV and NIV have "do not be harsh with them". KJV and NASB have something like "do not become bitter against them". The only other places where this word is used in the NT is in Revelation. It is used twice of the scroll that John ate and was bitter in his stomach but sweet in his mouth (Rev 10:9-10). It was used of bitter water in Revelation 8:11. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says the meaning in this verse is "do not become angry, incensed against your wives". BDAG (a Greek-English lexicon) says that the meaning is, do not "be embittered against" your wives. (3:19)

What was Paul's exhortation to children? What reason was given for this exhortation? Is this exhortation still applicable for today? How do most people in the United States answer this question? (3:20)

What was Paul's exhortation to fathers? What reason was given for this exhortation? What are some ways in which fathers can provoke their children? How does this cause the children to become discouraged? (3:21)

Read Colossians 3:22-4:1.

The ESV has the word "bondservants" in verse 22 as well as a number of other translations. You can read the preface to an ESV Bible to discover why they translate the word this way. KJV has "servants" while NKJV has "bondservants". The NIV and NASB have "slaves". What was Paul's exhortation to slaves in verse 22? (3:22)

Do you think that the exhortations to slaves also apply to the workplace when working for a boss? What does it mean to do a task “by way of eye-service” and as a “people-pleaser”? Have you ever fallen into this pattern at work? What is wrong with doing this? The end of the verse contains the correct attitude. What was the attitude required of them? (3:22)

What was Paul’s exhortation to slaves in verse 23? Is this a good general principle for all Christians regardless of their job? Why or why not? ESV has the phrase “work heartily”. The phrase is literally “work from the heart / soul” and thus means to “work heartily”. “Heartily” is in contrast to working just to look good when the boss is watching. (3:23)

Why were slaves to work as though they were working for their heavenly Lord and not their earthly master? (3:24)

Do you think that verse 25 was directed toward slaves or toward masters, or both? What principle is contained in verse 25? See Galatians 6:7. (3:25)

What was Paul’s exhortation to masters? What reason did Paul give for this exhortation? (4:1)

The ESV’s use of “bondservant” may give someone the idea that there were no slaves in that culture. There were situations where someone would be locked into service to a master for a set number of years and then released. This practice seems similar to Jews becoming bondservants for a set amount of time to pay off a debt. But there were also slaves as a result of military conquest. Personally, I think “bondservant” is a bit narrow for the situation in Colossae. Some may have been bondservants but others could have been what we know as slaves.

How would you address the accusation that the Bible condones slavery because it does not condemn it?