

Rules for Saints at Home (Colossians 3:18-21)

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Introduction

1. The general hortative section ended with a summary exhortation (v. 17): “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
 - a. This exhortation is all inclusive (“whatever;” “everything”) and binding on all believers (*you* [plural] *do* – implied imperative based on “*in the name of*”).
 - b. *Name* relates to the authority of the Lord Jesus. Thus, believers are to live under the authority of Jesus is everything that they say and do.
 - c. Paul is striking at the very root of the pre-Gnostic heresy that was tempting the Colossian church to undermine the authority of Jesus Christ.
 - d. This exhortation is the governing principle by which all believers must live to the glory of Christ.
2. The section before us (3:18-4:6) is a specific application of the general exhortations of the previous verses, especially v. 17.
 - a. These verses reference three areas of life where one’s faith is most easily observed as it is lived out, from the most intimate connection outward – family (3:18-21), work (3:22-4:1), and community (4:2-6). We will take these in three messages.
 - b. In Colossians 3, Paul gives an abbreviated version of the instruction found in Ephesians 5:1-6:20.
 - 1) The general appeals are covered in 5:1-20 and follow the essential points in Col. 3:1-17: “walk in love,” walk in light,” and “walk in wisdom.”
 - 2) The specific appeals are covered more extensively, especially those addressing home life. In fact, we ought to be dealing with these issues in a series by itself.

I. The importance of the Duties

1. The focus
 - a. This it is not about improving marriage and family; it is about living under the authority of Jesus Christ in all things. One can have a good marriage and be disobedient to God.
 - b. Merely focusing on making marriage better is counterproductive because a better marriage may make one happy but it is *Christ*, not happiness that must be pursued.
 - c. The believer’s work is Spirit-wrought *selflessness* wherein Christ is the source and end of all one’s needs and desires. A wife who hopes to find security in a good husband will likely be disappointed.
2. The goal
 - a. The love of Christ must be the controlling motive of all we do (2 Cor. 5:14). Only when we fear God (live under His authority and love) are we free of self to serve others.

- b. The error of much marriage counselling is that it works to enable the couple to get more out of the marriage. The Bible's aim is to enable us *to serve one another*.
3. The covenant connection
- a. Marriage is a great illustration of Christianity because both are founded on covenant principles (Eph. 5:30-32).
 - b. Tim Keller writes: "Someone who says, 'I love you, but we don't need to be married' may be saying, 'I don't love you enough to curtail my freedom for you.'" A covenant does not stifle love, it is an environment for authentic self-giving.
 - c. Covenant ties assure us two things: (1) that we will be loved, (2) that we will be known (1 John 4:19). This knowledge and understanding of our relationship to God in all of its security is the basis for our loving and serving Christ.
 - d. Serving God on the basis of law brings no joy; serving God on the basis of love brings fullness of joy.

II. Explanation of the duties

1. Wives are to *submit* (*hupotasso*, "to rank under") to their husbands.
 - a. *Submitting* means that she recognizes God's roll for her husband-leader, that she is to place herself under his protection and care by honoring and affirming him in that role, helping him as is proper ("fitting").
 - b. She is to submit to her husband *as* she submits to the Lord – Jesus, *her authority* (Eph. 5:22). It is based on two things: (1) her order in the creation (1 Tim. 2:13) and (2) Christ's position in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11: 3).
 - c. "*In the Lord*" refers to the church, the new community of those who call Christ *Lord*.
2. Husbands are to *love* (*agapao*, "to love") their wives.
 - a. *Loving* is self-denying service for the welfare of another (Eph. 5:25). It is unceasing and sacrificial care for another's well-being.
 - b. Paul argues that the goal of Christ's love for the church was present her as glorious and without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). Thus the husband is to work to nourish (build up) and cherish (to treat with tender care) his wife. He is to help her become all that Christ wants for her (Eph. 5:29).
3. Children are to obey (*hupokouo*, "to listen and obey") their parents in everything.
 - a. Obeying is based on *listening* to know the desire of one in authority, a parent, and following through with obedience.
 - b. When children learn obedience, they can serve the Lord ("this pleases the Lord").
4. Fathers are not to *discourage* their children (see also Eph. 6:4).
 - a. Being overly strict is not the problem, but being harsh, abusive, and demanding of them without loving nurture and patient instruction will go badly for them and you.
 - b. Children want and need firm, consistent guidance with loving instruction in which to thrive. They are discouraged and can become bitter and angry with inconsistent, harsh, and hypocritical demands.

In light of this passage, we need to ask—

1. What do I expect from my spouse?
2. Am I in this marriage for what I can get or for what I can give?
3. Do my children obey me?
4. Am I consistent, firm, and loving in my discipline?
5. Do I discipline according to my children's needs or according to my frustration and anger with how my life is affected by their behavior?
6. Am I seeing my home as an opportunity to grow in Christ and serve Him?

“The main enemy of marriage – sinful self-centeredness” – Timothy Keller