

How To Honour God In Your Relationships

Letter to the Colossians

I want to describe to you what Switzerland could be like with a different government.

With a new government, rather than living together, people will commit to marriage, and those marriages will be happy. Husbands will treat their wives gently and lovingly. Wives will respect their husbands. Husbands and wives will be submissive to each other, always wanting the best for the other person. The goal of marriage will not be to seek personal happiness, but to make the other person happy. People will honour the marriage vows they made when they got married, and will be committed to each other for a lifelong relationship. When couples strike difficulties, both husband and wife will each work hard at finding solutions. Couples will communicate honestly and openly with each other.

In this new society, under a new government, children will be obedient and respectful of their parents. When everyone in the class has the latest clothing label or gadget and parents say "No, you can't have one" children will accept that ruling and be obedient to their parents, without making a big fuss about it. When there is a new government, fathers will be understanding of their children, and will never do anything to exasperate them or frustrate them.

This attitude of healthy submission and obedience will flow over into the workplace too when we have a new government. Workers will cheerfully accept direction from their bosses, overseers and managers. Even when they are not being supervised, workers will give a fair days work for their paid employment. In fact, they won't need to be supervised at all, because their motivation will come from a set of internal values that means they will always do a bit extra without being asked, not because they have to, but because they want to. Whatever they work at, they will give it 100%, and they will do it with a smile on their face.

Under a new government, bosses and managers will have a whole new attitude. They will treat their workers with dignity and respect. There will be no more wage bargaining where they are trying to screw the employees down to working for a pittance, wanting longer hours and more work for less money. With a new government, it won't be profit and greed, but justice and fairness that will be uppermost in the minds of employers. They will be wanting to do the very best they can for those that work for them.

Wouldn't you like to live under that kind of government? Can you imagine what society would look like if those kinds of values were in operation? Imagine what this country would be like if every family relationship was happy. Where husbands and wives cherished and loved one another. Imagine a country where children respected their parents, parents didn't exasperate their kids, and where workplace relationships were harmonious. Imagine that kind of world. It can happen if there is the right kind of government.

Even if you are not a Swiss citizen you and I have the power to make this happen. Let's read what Paul wrote to the church in Colossae about this sort of government.

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven."
(Colossians 3:18 – 4:1)

What I have read to you is a Godly vision of a society based on Kingdom values. Paul is describing how you and I can live under the government of God. He is teaching us here how to do marriage, parenting and work in the name of Jesus.

If you think that what Paul was describing is too radical and unrealistic for our society, imagine what those Christians in Colossae must have thought when they first read this letter. In their day, women had no legal status in marriage. A husband had absolute power over his wife. A wife was a possession. A husband could divorce his wife for almost any reason. If she burned his dinner, that was legal grounds for divorce. But it didn't work the other way round. A woman had virtually no power to divorce her husband for any reason. In their society children were to be seen and not heard, and boys were far more valued than girls. Baby girls were often put out on the street to die, because they had no value. About 30% of the people of Colossae were slaves. They had no rights at all. They were the absolute possession of their masters. Masters owned slaves in the same way as farmers own tractors. They were an implement for work.

What Paul is teaching these Colossian Christians is how to model the values of the Kingdom of God in a society that doesn't know how to treat people with respect and dignity. He's teaching them how to live under the government of God. This teaching is as much for us now as it was for them then. We can model for our society how to live under the government of God.

1. Marriage.

When Paul addresses married couples, he almost always comes back to the issue of servanthood. In Ephesians Chapter 5, he describes for us what a husband's love ought to look like. It ought to look like Christ's love for the church. It's a love of sacrifice and servanthood. That's what marriage in the Lord looks like. Marriage outside of the Lord looks more like "How can I get what I want out of the other person?"

Often one of the first things couples ask each other when they get together at the end of a busy day is "How did your day go?" Sometimes that's a loaded question. He has been at work in the office under all kinds of stress, and she has been at home with the preschoolers, also under all kinds of stress. Implicit in the question is "My day was more stressful than yours!" He says, "I had lunch with this member of the board". She thinks, "You had lunch in a restaurant and spoke intelligent adult conversation with verbs and everything?" He says, "What did you do?" She says "I took the kids to the park." He thinks, "You spent the afternoon with the kids in the park having a picnic and playing games?" Our perception is that we are having it tougher than the other person, so we deserve to be served.

When you are angling to get the other person to serve you, they begin to play the same game. Then things go in a downward spiral, and each person tries harder to get the other one to be their servant. But when we choose to be a servant to the one we are married to, something happens. It makes the other person want to serve too.

2. Parenting.

Parenting has huge pressures associated with it. Erma Bombeck once wrote "We had four children. I remember how, but I don't remember why." In the midst of the pressures of parenting it is possible to respond to our children in such a way that they become discouraged. Is there anything that you're doing as a parent that is causing your children to lose heart? Is there anything that you're doing that is causing them to become discouraged? Nagging can be something that does it. Belittling their efforts. Inappropriate kinds of teasing. Comparing them to siblings or other children. Failing to provide boundaries. Failing to provide discipline. Unrealistic expectations.

Paul says we are to parent our children in such a way that they do not lose heart and become dispirited, broken, frustrated or fragile. The goal is to build large hearted, courageous, servant minded human beings. That doesn't just happen of its own accord. It takes parents who are committed to carving out adequate time to the task of parenting. We need families who will model a Godly way of parenting kids. Your family can be a part of that.

3. Work.

Paul was addressing the question of slaves and masters, as that was the most common expression of work in those days. In a biblical sense, work is the creation of value. If you're cooking food, constructing a road, or dealing with people, it's all the same. It's not necessarily

something you have to be paid for. The person who is staying home to do house work and caring for children is still doing work. Tony Campolo is a professor of sociology and often mingles with highly educated individuals. He wrote of an experience he shared with his wife. He said, "I was once at a very sophisticated academic gathering at the University of Pennsylvania. I didn't want to be there, and I felt uncomfortable with the kinds of conversation that were going on. A woman colleague who taught sociology struck up a conversation with my wife and me. At one point she turned to my wife and asked, in a condescending fashion, 'And what is it that you do, my dear?' My wife, who is one of the most articulate people I know, shot back, 'I am socializing two Homo sapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be the instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia that God willed from the beginning of Creation!' Then my wife asked politely and sweetly, 'And what is it that you do?' The woman answered humbly, 'I...I...teach sociology.' "

In 1997 in Britain the Institute of Managers did a survey on the effects of long hours spent at work.

They measured across five key lifestyle areas, and then two years later they surveyed again. This is what they found.

	1997	1999
No time for other interests	77%	87%
Damaging Health	59%	71%
Affecting relationship with children	73%	86%
Affecting relationship with partner	72%	79%
Reduces productivity over time	55%	68%

People are not working longer and harder because they are ambitious or materialistic. They are working longer and harder because they feel that if they don't, their employers will find someone who will. Unless we get God's perspective on work, we are going to get sucked in to the values that are pushed out there in the workplace.

The Key Principle.

There is a key principle that keeps recurring in this passage of scripture we have read this morning. See if you can spot it.

Verse 18 "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

Verse 20 "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."

Verse 22 "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord."

Verse 23 & 24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Chapter 4 verse 1 "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven."

The key principle is that we behave in these ways because we are wanting to please the Lord. The goal in marriage is to behave in such a way toward your marriage partner that you are pleasing the Lord. It's parenting our kids in such a way that we are pleasing the Lord. It's being respectful toward our parents in such a way that we are pleasing the Lord. It's acting towards your boss at work in such a way that you are pleasing the Lord. It's treating your employees in such a way that you are pleasing the Lord. That's what it means to honour God in our relationships. It's government that comes from inside of us, not government that is imposed from the outside of us. That's what it means to live under the government of God. Here's a practical goal for us all. Aim to get to the end of a day, having given the Lord our best for our marriage, or our parenting, or our work, so that you can hear him say "I'm pleased". Here's a goal for life. Aim to get to the end of your life, to hear him say "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord". If I can hear him say that, it will be enough.

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