

The Gospel and Relationships
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Colossians 3:18-4:1

“Who’s the Boss?” Do you remember the sitcom in the mid-80’s by that title? [Tony Danza/Judith Light] What was that premise of the show that led to the title?

I mention “Who’s the Boss” to help us recall an important point in this text but I’m not going where you might think. “Who’s the Boss” is NOT about verse eighteen.

Lord help the Bible study leader that has to begin a study with the words: “*Wives, submit to your husbands!*” That’s NOT why I bring up “Who’s the Boss,” and let’s not “stub our toes” on that one verse which can be misunderstood.

Colossians 3:18-4:1 is about relationships. Specifically, how followers of Christ should relate to others in the family and on the job. When our hearts have been changed by the gospel it should change our relationships with other people. How should Christian husbands and wives relate to each other? How should Christian parents relate to their children? How should a Christian employee related to their boss at work and how should a Christian employer treat their people? Our relationships should reflect that we are working to serve our REAL Boss - Jesus.

Here’s the truth that should change us this week: Scripture teaches us how followers of Christ should relate as spouses, parents, children, and employees. Relationships require WORK and we can succeed at them if we do that work in a way that pleases our REAL boss, the Lord Jesus.

Colossians 3:18–4:1 (ESV) — 18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. **20** Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. **22** Bondservants, obey in everything those who

are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **23** Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. **1** Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

- Let's talk about the word "submit." It doesn't mean oppressive authority for husbands. This word relates to the military idea of a chain of command.
- What would happen in any human organization without a chain of command in making decisions? Sometimes we need a "tie breaker."
- The verse says, "*submit...as is fitting in the Lord.*" That doesn't mean God favors husbands over wives. How do I know that? Ask Paul.
- **Galatians 3:28 (ESV) — 28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Equal before God, but voluntarily accepting different roles in the home.
- There is a parallel passage from Paul in Ephesians 5:19-6:9.
- Right before Paul said "wives submit to your husbands," he said in 5:21: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." ⁱⁱ (Emphasis mine)
- Christ honoring marriage is about loving, voluntary, MUTUAL submission.
- What about husbands? Paul said, "Love" your wife and don't be "harsh."
- The word "love" here is "agape" "*the sacrificing, serving love that Christ shares with His church.*"ⁱⁱⁱ Eph. 5:25 commands, "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*"^{iv}
- If you know Christ, that verse doesn't require explanation, but let's apply it.
- Husbands ask yourself: "*How would I treat someone I love so much that I am willing to DIE for them?*" Wives: "*How would you*

treat someone who loves you so much they are willing to DIE for you?" Think about that.

- This isn't about oppressive dictatorship this is about love and service.
- What is this like in real life? I'm willing to share how Susan and I apply these verses at our house, first, how does this work at your house? How is the average day different than a day when a big decision must be made?
- The relationship between Christian husbands and wives isn't about "who's the boss" between them; it's about pleasing "the REAL boss" – Jesus.
- A marriage that pleases Christ will display love, respect, and self-sacrifice because that's who HE is! That's "Christ-likeness" in marriage.
- Children obey your parents is the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12)
- Parents, verse 21 says, don't "aggravate" or "discourage" your children.
- Eugene Peterson's The Message paraphrase renders it: *"Parents, don't come down too hard on your children or you'll crush their spirits."*^x
- God is our example of a loving Heavenly Father. He disciplines His children without destroying our self-image or self-respect.
- Our children shouldn't feel, *"I can't do anything to please them."*
- This doesn't mean Christians should be "passive parents." That would violate other scripture (Proverbs 29:15-17, Hebrews 12:6-11.) [Illustration: Even the sweet ones will try to "work" you. Knox: *"Granddad said YES!"*]
- What is likely to happen in adulthood to a child with no parental discipline?
- Here's a quote with a caveat. First, the caveat: Some children are so strong-willed that even the best parents struggle to lovingly discipline them. That said, listen to this quote from Warren Wiersbe: *"For the most part, children do not create problems; they reveal them. Parents who cannot discipline themselves cannot discipline their children."*^{x/i}
- Passive parenting is more a statement about the parent than the child.

- How did you do it? How did you discipline without “crushing their spirit?”
- A Christ-following parent will work to please Him in raising our kids.
- Verse 22 is controversial; “slaves, obey your masters.” I’m not trying to dodge this but it’s too big for us to resolve in small group. Let’s acknowledge that slavery was WRONG in God’s eyes but it was a reality in the culture of the first century church so Paul addressed it.
- For our purposes, we can apply this to employees and employers. How should a Christ-following employee do their job and respect the boss? How should a Christ-following manager treat their employees?

Colossians 3:23–4:1 (NLT) — 23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. **24** Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. **25** But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites. **1** Masters, be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven.

- I have embraced these verses both as a leader and as an employee.
- We don’t need much interpretation of that text. It’s pretty straightforward.
- Work hard, do your best, considering the Lord Jesus as your REAL boss.
- Is my work ethic different when the boss isn’t looking? The REAL boss is.
- Doing a poor job for our employer is a bad testimony for a Christ-follower. Our work performance reflects on our REAL Boss – Jesus Christ.
- What if you have a bad boss? Thankfully, I’ve only had a couple. Most people respond to bad bosses like the stress response: fight or flight.
- They either passive-aggressively undermine the boss or they just run.
- Sometimes you SHOULD run from a bad boss, but sometimes God directs us to stay, at least for a time, under a bad boss.

- A bad boss once tried to persuade me to leave because there was no future for me there. Six months later I had HIS job. 😊
- Working to please our REAL BOSS (Jesus) helps us endure a bad boss.
- Christian bosses should be just and fair because that's Who Jesus is.
- Any thoughts on your experiences with being a Christian at work?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- I want to make a final point about “Who's the Boss” in verses 23 & 24.
- Paul's context was working at a job when he said “working for the Lord.”
- I want to expand that context. Every role, husband, wife, child, parent, employee, or boss requires work. Christ-followers succeed if we work at our role with our REAL BOSS (Jesus) in mind.
- If I remember I will one day give an account to God (my REAL Boss) for the kind of husband I've been, I'll love Susan as Christ loved the church.
- The same would apply to wives, parents, employees, bosses, any role.
- In my “job” as a spouse, Who's the REAL Boss? In my “job” as parent, Who's the REAL Boss? In my “day job” where I earn a living, Who's the REAL Boss? In my job as a leader and manager, Who's the REAL Boss? Paul said, [We are] “...working for the Lord rather than for people.
- Verse 24: *“Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.”^{vii}*
- This week, when we are “working” at our various roles in life, let's remember Who is REALLY the Boss – the Lord Jesus – and live in a way that honors Him.

ⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 3:18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 5:21). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 142). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^{iv} [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Eph 5:25). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- ^v Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](#) (Col 3:21). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- ^{vi} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 143). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^{vii} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Col 3:23–24). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.