

### 3:18-4:1 Discussion Questions

#### Discussion Questions

*Feel free to choose what questions will be most helpful to your group to grow in their understanding of the Scripture, learn how to better read the Bible for themselves, and faithfully apply it to their lives.*

Read 3:18-4:1

1. Up to this point in Colossians, Paul has outlined a number of big ideas. First, he emphasized that while we used to belong to the domain of darkness God has transferred us to the kingdom of his Son, Christ Jesus. Then he highlighted the supremacy of Jesus over all authorities. After that he told them, because Jesus is better and above all other philosophies don't try and rely upon man-made traditions or religious practices for spiritual growth; that only comes through Jesus. And so, seek the things that are heavenly because your identity is in Jesus who is in heaven. This means put off the old man and put on the new, which is like Jesus.

a. Now Paul is talking about marriage, parenting, and slaves and masters. What does this have to do with what he was just talking about? How does it fit?

2. When Paul addresses married couples he exhorts the women to submit and the men to love.

a. What is biblical "submission?"

b. What is biblical "love?"

c. Does Paul give us any indication that a man's love for his wife depends upon her submission or visa versa?

d. What reasoning does Paul provide for the women's submission?

e. How does Paul illustrate what it means to for a husband to love his wife?

3. Every husband and wife recognizes the challenge of living these commands out.

a. For the ladies: What have you found is the key to being able to walk in biblical submission to your husbands? What has helped you grow in this area?

b. For the men: What have you found is the key to being able to love your wives, leading and serving them with gentleness and kindness? What has helped you grow in this area?

4. Next, Paul moves on to address children and fathers.

a. What rationale does Paul provide for children obeying their parents?

b. Compare this with the reason he gave for wives submitting. What do you find?

c. Paul addresses fathers specifically because in Roman households the responsibility for instructing the children lay with the father. He admonishes them not to “provoke” or “embitter” their children. Paul points out that this kind of parenting will lead to discouragement; in other words, the child is overburdened by the domineering parent and gives up trying to please the parent.

(1) How do you know if you or someone is doing this? How do we discern whether we are provoking our children by putting undue stress or pressure on our kids?

(2) What motivates or leads to this kind of parenting?

(3) How have you seen or experienced this, either as a parent or a child?

(4) If you are a parent, how are you currently being tempted to put undue pressure your child?

(5) What are lessons that you have learned on how to avoid this?

5. Finally, Paul addresses bondservants (or slaves) and masters. This is because most Roman households at the time included slaves. (See attached for an outline of slavery in the Roman Empire during Paul's time. It also addresses the question of why Christians would have slaves in the first place.)

a. Paul instructs them to obey their earthly masters in everything. What reasons does he give them for this?

b. How does Paul's instruction to slaves help us think about work and responsibility in a new way, even and especially in difficult and unjust situations?

c. In the Roman system of employment, masters had special rights over their slaves, so there was a lot of room for abuse. How does Paul's instruction to masters level the playing field?

d. What kinds of applications does this have for employer-employee relations in how bosses treat those that work for them?

6. What do we do when the relationship we are in—whether a marriage, parent/child or employer/employee—is broken?

a. When does a difficult situation become a destructive one?

b. How should we handle destructive (abusive) relationships?

7. What do Paul's instructions here teach us about how to live in the midst of unjust and corrupt social or economic systems?

8. This kind of household codes were common at the time. It is important to notice that in a household the husband, father, and master were all the same person, i.e., the *paterfamilias* or the head of the household. They usually just told everyone to obey the *paterfamilias* and reasserted his right to rule.

a. How is Paul's instruction different?

b. When Paul speaks to those who are supposed to submit or obey, what is the common theme that we find in the rationale for their submission/obedience?

c. How does this reshape the way we should view authority in the home?

d. How can we do a better job of submitting our homes to the lordship of Christ?

### *Roman Slavery During the First Century AD*

#### *1. The Nature of Slavery in the Empire*

Slavery was *the* employment system. That was the primary way that people (aside from independent farmers and low level merchants) gained employment, developed skills and advanced socially. It was also often the path to Roman citizenship for those that were not born into it.

Slaves were contracted laborers who worked for an agreed upon amount of time and compensation. The master provided the necessary training and education for the slave to fulfill their role. Slaves were typically set free by the age of 30.

That being said it was still an unjust system that created opportunity for abuse. Slaves did not have the same legal rights as their masters, and were thus at their mercy when it came to most legal matters. Also, for some it was voluntary, but for those not (e.g. those born into it).

#### *2. Why didn't Christians start an abolitionist movement?*

To abolish slavery in the empire would have required a massive re-organization of society from the ground up--a social and economic revolution. In societies with representative government (like ours) that kind of thing can be sponsored or initiated by various groups within society. In a dictatorship like Rome, it would have to come from the highest strata of society and be imposed from the top down. For this reason, Christians were not in a position to influence the institution of slavery legally or politically.

#### *3. Why didn't Christians just release all their slaves?*

First, there were legal limits as to when a slave could be released (by age).

Also, if they just released all their slaves, then the slaves would be on their own with no way to provide for themselves—unless they were far enough along in the service to have acquired the skills and capital to go into business for themselves. In all likelihood, they would have just had to become slaves of someone else. If all the Christians are releasing their slaves then that means the released slave would have to become a slave of a non-Christian which would be a much worse situation for the slave.

#### 4. Undermining it from within

What Christians could do was to undermine the institution from within by not treating slaves like slaves, but like brothers and sisters. This way slaves still had their livelihood and their chance to move towards being able to be independent, but without being devalued or mistreated.

And so Paul instructed slaves to obey their masters (e.g. Col 3, Eph 6) as all people are to obey those in authority over them whether they are good or evil (cf. Rom 13). And they were not to take advantage of their Christian masters who were kind to them (1 Tim 6).

Masters were to be just and fair and not use threats or intimidation—much less assault (Col 3; Eph 6:9).

And finally, slaves and free were the same in Christ: all made in the image of God and all brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). This kind of thinking would lay the theological groundwork to liberate all slaves from oppression where they are treated cruelly without regard or worth.