

Colossians

UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



Colossians 3:18-25 Inductive Bible Study with Discussion Questions

Outline

I. Instruction on Family Relationships (18-21)

- A. Wives (18)
- B. Husbands (19)
- C. Children (20)
- D. Fathers (21)

II. Obedience from the Heart (22-25)

I. Instruction on Family Relationships (18-21)

Discussion Questions

- Who is the wife to be subject to?
- Why is this, "fitting in the Lord"?
- As a woman, what would you say if a friend told you submitting to your husband means that you are inferior to him?
- As a man, what would you say to someone who attacks this idea as being antiquated and demeaning to women?
- What is the role of the husband?
- Why does Paul add not to become, "embittered against them?"
- How can both sides defend against bitterness?
- What is one way you can improve your marriage? How specifically will you do that this week?
- What are children commanded to do?
- Why is it important to follow the structure of authority in the family outlined in this passage?
- What is true obedience?
- Why should children obey their parents?



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- Does this command apply to adults whose parents are still living? Why or why not?
- What important check for parents is given here? Why is this important?
- What does this verse show fathers they should be focused on?
- What command is given to slaves?
- What important principles can we glean from these verses that can be applied in the modern world?

Cross-References

1 Peter 3:7 – Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5 – The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Peter 3:1-6, Ephesians 5:25-33 – For more detailed commands to husbands and wives, please refer to these passages.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 – Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

Proverbs 17:6 – Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

Proverbs 22:6 – Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.

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Mark 10:14 – When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Psalms 127:1 – Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Verse by Verse Commentary

Introduction: Christ is to take the priority in our families. Around the world the family is under attack. The divorce rate has skyrocketed, one parent homes are commonplace, unfaithfulness is more common and normal. “One-night stands” are exalted. Children are spoiled, unhappy, rebellious, and out of control. Further, parents are at their wits end. Many times, they just leave their children alone because forcing them to comply is too tiring or they become angry and upset. News stories often pop up showing how desperate parents truly are.

In one recent story, a mother went “on strike”. The mother refused to do any work and instead held a sign in her front yard and complained to passersby about her unruly children and ungrateful husband. In another case a father made his child use a hammer to destroy his video game system because his grades were bad.

Christian families are often times no better. The family is being assaulted from every side like never before. It is not easy to have a Christ-centered, Godly family in this day and age. But neither is it impossible. Through God’s grace and through His revealed plan for families we can be victorious. We do not have to navigate these murky waters on our own. God has already revealed to us the principles which our families should be guided by.

1. *Wives submit* – This is one of several places in scripture wives are commanded to be submissive to their husbands. Paul is laying out God’s divinely purposed authority structure for the family to eliminate any potential for chaos. If God did not lay out the structure of a family, families would be chaos as each one tries to come up with their own system of rules and exceptions.

He doesn’t want confusion and chaos. He doesn’t want there to be multiple people or groups striving to lead and bickering about who is in charge. A home with multiple heads cannot

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function well. Neither can a home with no head. God's design of one clearly identified head-of-household is the best.

2. *As to the Lord* – Here, Paul mentions the level that wives are to submit to their husbands. This command is a very loftily set bar. They are to obey their husbands as if it was the Lord Himself directing them. God asks us to submit to him with a good attitude and without complaining. He wants wives to treat their husbands the same way. Submission is not manipulating, arguing, complaining, or nagging. Wives who truly seek to honor God will submit graciously and with a kind spirit.

At the same time submission does not mean that the wives cannot share their opinions with their husbands, or that husbands need not consider their wives. Neither does it mean that husbands should make unilateral decisions.

In my marriage, I always seek to talk with my wife about serious issues and come to an agreement before making decisions. Almost every single time, we are able to come to agreement on a course of action. Other times, she may rely on my expertise, or experience in a certain field and say, "I trust your judgment. You decide." And sometimes if we don't agree, it is also OK for the husband to say, "let's try it your way."

Being the head, means that final authority to make a decision is given by God to the husband so that the house will run in an orderly manner. It does mean that the husband should use this responsibility in a selfish manner to get his own way.

Illustration: A marriage is much like a basketball team. Each player has a different position. They are to work together in harmony towards a common goal. This unity and teamwork allows them to cover the deficiencies of one team member and enhance their strengths. No one player can win by himself. A team needs each other.

This is like how God has designed the church and how God has designed marriage. Modern women buck at the concept that they should respect and submit to their husbands because they feel that that means they are inferior or less important. This is clearly not true.

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God has designed different, but complementary, roles for men and women. This is much like salt and pepper. Each has its own function, but they are best when used together in complement.

3. *Wives submit to you own husbands* – This is important because some men want all women to submit to them. But this is unbiblical. As a woman, you are not required to submit to all men. If you are married, you are required to submit to your own husband. This relationship also takes priority over your relationship to your parents. Once married, you have created a new family unit (Genesis 2:24). There will be times when your parents want you to do one thing. Your husband may want to do another thing. In this case, you must follow your husband’s leadership and politely decline your parents’ suggestion.

4. What can single women be doing now to prepare for submitting to your husbands? You should practice following, especially at church. During church activities try to be a good follower and supporter. You can gently encourage the brothers to take the lead. Practice an attitude of humility towards your church leadership. Before making big decisions, ask your elders or other leaders for advice. Make a habit of listening to this advice. Show more honor and respect to your parents, especially your dad. Ask his opinion on things. Listen to his counsel. Respect his rules. Learn to pray for those in authority and forgive their mistakes instead of nitpicking.

5. *Guys, what can we do to make this task easier for our wives?* – The simple answer is that when you love your wives (more following) you make it far easier for them to submit to you. Some women may say “Sure, I can submit to the Lord. He is perfect. But you don’t know my husband!” While wives should submit to their imperfect husbands, you can help them to do this by fulfilling your own role properly.

6. *Husbands* – I want to take a minute to remind both husbands and wives about the context for this passage (see Colossians 3:12-17). You see, wives are not *only* supposed to submit to their husbands and husbands are not *only* supposed to love their wives. A husband/wife must follow all of these verses about how to be the right kind of person. Sometimes in our zeal to teach the biblical roles of husband/wife we tend to forget that those specific roles come after what the rest of the Bible teaches to every believer. We are to be kind, compassionate, humble, patient, forgiving, thankful, peaceful, and tolerant toward our wife or husband just as we are to

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be toward other believers. And let me tell you that it is much more challenging to be that way toward a person you live with 24/7 than people you only see once or twice a week.

For all of the singles, you can prepare for marriage by growing in all of these areas because marriage will put each and every one of them to the test.

For those who are married, you can greatly improve your marriages by growing in each of these areas.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church – Throughout the Bible (ex: 1 Peter 3:7), we see that God's key instruction to husbands is to love their wives. The husband is to perform his role as head of the family in a loving and kind way, considering the needs and feelings of his wife. Husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Paul sets a very high bar and points to Jesus as the example for husbands. So how did Christ love the church?

- He sacrificed Himself for the church.
- He never leaves or forsakes us.
- He put our needs above His own.
- He is always considering our good.
- He served us.
- He gave God's message to us.
- He loved us unconditionally.

These are the ways a husband is to love his wife. A husband should not treat his wife like a slave simply because he is the head. Jesus is the highest authority and He still humbled Himself to be a servant (Philippians 2). Therefore, biblical leadership is servant leadership. Biblical love is unconditional and self-sacrificing.

When husbands love their wives in this way, it is much easier for wives to respect and submit themselves to their husbands. And when wives practice respectful submission, it is much easier for husbands to practice loving leadership.

Note also that Jesus loved us first (1 John 4:19). He loved us when we were unlovely and undeserving. In broken and struggling marriages it is common for both sides to be hurt and

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unwilling to make themselves vulnerable by being the first to take action. However, husbands are required to love as Christ did. That means husbands should take the initiative to show love in action to their wives, even when their wives may be in the wrong in some area.

Hosea is a clear example of this. Over and over again he showed unconditional love to his wife, who betrayed him by being faithless.

As a loving leader, husbands can be the first one to apologize, the first one to approach their spouse to find a solution to an argument, and the first one to say, "let's pray about this."

Do not become embittered against them (or do not treat them harshly) – What does this phrase mean? Certainly, being gently, gracious, and forgiving should just about cover it (no matter which specific translation you use here). It is another reminder that the role of being a godly husband goes far beyond often saying, "I love you" to his wife.

Application: Wives, how would you like your husband to show love to you? What kind of things does he do to make you feel like you are loved? Husbands, how can you better practice servant leadership? What is one area you need to show love in action to your wives this week?

7. *Children* – Children are commanded to obey their parents. For parents, this means that you should expect and require your children to obey you. You are not doing them any favors by allowing them to run free and do whatever they like. Both the morals and respect for authority children learn when they are young will influence them for the rest of their life. New age philosophy sometimes teaches parents never to say, "no," to their children. Make no mistake, this is a lie from Satan and a very destructive idea. Training up children in the right way is no easy task.

Obeing one's parents is a direct command from God. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." (Ephesians 6:1) The word, "obey" in this verse cannot be separated from the idea of "honoring" them. Ephesians 6:2–3 continues: "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first command with a promise— "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on earth." Honor has more to do with one's attitude of respect toward one's parents, and it's

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understood that the obedience is to be done with an attitude of honor toward one's parents. begrudging obedience does not conform to the command.

It may be challenging for children to learn to obey and honor their parents. For some children, it's harder than others! But there is a very good reason for this command. Proverbs teaches that those who listen to their parents gain wisdom.

God's design is for children to learn to honor and obey their parents as they grow up so that they can live wisely. As they learn respect at home, they will respect others appropriately when they leave the home. Even young Jesus, though he was the Son of God, obeyed His earthly parents and as a result grew in wisdom (Luke 2:51-52). The Bible says that children who are not disciplined or who fail to obey to their parents are much worse off in life (see Proverbs 22:15; 19:18; and 29:15).

Are adults required to obey their parents? The verse says, "children," and the Greek word is not very specific on the age. In light of Genesis 2:24, it is reasonable to think that children should obey their parents until they are married. However, even adults should honor their parents, though they are not required to obey them absolutely.

8. *Fathers* – As children have a responsibility to obey their parents, parents have a responsibility to instruct their children in the ways of God.

Ephesians 6:4 – Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Here an important warning is given to fathers. The key focus of successful parenting is your child's heart. The child's heart attitude is far more important than external obedience. A child who grows up surly and bitter toward their parents and their faith on the inside, but who obeys purely out of fear of discipline will surely run as far from the church as he can when he grows up. So how can parents guide their children's heart?

- Be reasonable. Don't say, "no," to your kids' requests just because you can.

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- Be friendly to your kids, not only an authority figure. If most of your communication toward your kids is just the giving of rules or punishment there is a problem. Your children should sense your love and care for them as people, not as objects to be ruled.
- Pray for your children and pray with your children.
- Answer your children's questions about the Bible and life thoroughly instead of considering it is an irritation to stop your work to talk with them.
- Put your priority on family above work.
- Be a good model to your children. Practice what you preach.
- When you discipline, do so in love, not in anger.
- Do not raise your voice to your children.
- Spend time with your children doing fun things with them. If the home is a fun and happy place, it is not so likely they will want to run away from it.
- Try to understand why your child is doing what they are doing. Understand what is truly going on in their heart.
- Use Scripture to your guide your child's view of the world.
- Practice Deuteronomy 6 by talking about the things of God naturally wherever you are and whatever you are doing.

Above are just a few ways to guide your children's heart and improve your relationship with them. Do you have any more?

II. Obedience from the heart (3:22-25)

Discussion Questions

- What does the Bible have to say about slavery?
- Can these verses apply to us if we are not slaves? If so, how?
- What is the key principle from these verses?
- If our action or conduct is right, does it matter if our motivation is right? Why or why not?
- Give an example of something we may do that is good, but is not rightly motivated.
- What is the proper motivation?

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- What does it mean to fear the Lord?
- What does it mean to do your work heartily?
- How can we work for the Lord?
- What kind of work should we do for the Lord?
- What reason or reasons are given in verses 24-25 about why we should serve the Lord first (and not man) from our hearts?

Cross-References

Ezekiel 36:26 – I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Psalms 51:10 – Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Matthew 5:8 – Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Proverbs 4:23 – Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

On diligence:

Proverbs 13:4 – A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

2 Peter 3:14 – So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 – Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

2 Timothy 2:15 – Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

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Verse by Verse Commentary

1. *Does the Bible condone slavery?* – Throughout history in almost every corner of the earth, people have found themselves subjected to the horrors of slave trading. However, neither slavery in New Testament times, nor slavery under the Mosaic covenant, had anything to do with the sort of slavery where people were bought and sold as property. No Christian should think that they can use any slightly positive comment about slavery in these sections to justify the historic slave trade, which is still a major stain on the histories of almost every civilization.

The extreme kindness to be shown to slaves/servants commanded in the Bible among the Israelites was often prefaced by a reminder that they too were slaves at the hand of the Egyptians. In other words, they were to treat slaves/servants in a way that they wanted to be treated.

As we already know, slavery was common in the Middle East as far back as ancient Egypt. If God had simply ignored it, then there would have been no rules for their treatment and they could have treated them harshly with no rights. But since they did have rights and rules for their protection, it showed that God cared for them as well. However, this is often misconstrued for an endorsement of slavery, which it is not. God listed slave traders among the worst of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:10.

Exodus 21:16 – Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

According to this verse, those people involved in the slave trade in the 16th to 19th centuries should be executed.

In light of such rules, slaves/servants in Israelite culture came about by their own actions, whether from among the Israelites or neighboring cultures. Slaves in the Roman empire may, however, have been forced into it.

Slavery in Israel was a type of bankruptcy law. With this, a government didn't step in, but a person, who had lost themselves to debt, could sell the only thing they had left, their ability to

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perform labor. This was a loan. In six years, the loan was paid off, and they were set free. Bond servants who did this made a wage, had their debt covered, had a home to stay in, on-the-job training, and did it for only six years. This almost sounds better than college, which doesn't cover debt and you have to pay for it!

A few pointers to remember:

A. Slaves under Mosaic Law were different from the harshly treated slaves of other societies, more like servants or bond servants.

B. The Bible doesn't give an endorsement of slave traders but the opposite (1 Timothy 1:10). A slave/bond servant was acquired when a person voluntarily entered into it when he needed to pay off his debts.

C. The Bible recognizes that slavery is a reality in this sin-cursed world and doesn't ignore it, but instead gives regulations for good treatment by both masters and servants and reveals they are equal under Christ.

D. Israelites could sell themselves as a slave/bond servant to have their debts covered, make a wage, have housing and be set free after six years. Foreigners could sell themselves as a slave/bond servant as well. Thus, it was voluntary and temporary.

E. In God's family, every person is equal and valued (Galatians 3:28). For example, in 1 Timothy 3, qualifications for elders and deacons are listed out. If slaves met the qualifications through their own character, they could also be leaders of the church.

So, inside the church, slaves were not to be treated any differently than anyone else and had the same rights. Outside the church the rules of the government meant that slavery was a reality which Paul taught about so that believing slaves would know how to act.

2. *If slaves revolted it would have hindered the spread of the gospel* – Paul understood the consequences for Christianity if slaves began to revolt against their owners in the name of Christ. "The Way" of Jesus was new to people in the Roman Empire. They already had many false impressions and confusions about this faith. People in the Roman Empire actually, at times,

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believed that Christians practiced cannibalism (partaking of the Lord's body for communion) and orgies (love feasts, which were in reality just fellowship meals.) Some also thought that Christians were incestuous because they called each other, "brother and sister."

If slaves revolted, then the government would turn against this new faith. Christianity would be viewed as anti-social and trying to topple the current society. Persecution would ramp up. Masters and their families who could be won over through the gracious attitudes of their servants would likely instead turn against this faith which cost them their prosperity. In the end, the cause of the gospel would suffer.

In 1 Corinthians 9:19 Paul said that he became, "all things to all people so that I might by all means save some." For slaves to continue in obedience to their masters was an extension of this principle. Winning people to Christ and helping them win eternal freedom from sin was more important than the temporary freedom from slavery.

Generally, the Bible seeks to change society from the inside out one person at a time, rather than working through revolution. Paul, for example, advised Philemon to set his slave, Onesimus, free. This was the Christian thing to do.

Application: Employees should be respectful to their bosses and seek to win them to Christ through their actions. Your attitudes and behavior at work should be a testimony for Christ and bring people to Him, not repulse them.

3. *Paul will highlight different points to different groups* – Note that Paul was talking to the slaves, not the masters here. It is an important distinction. If he were talking to the masters, he would have said something different as in Colossians 4:1 and to Philemon. To slaves, he would emphasize obedience. And to masters, he would emphasize justice and mercy.

If you are a parent with multiple children, you know how the idea of highlighting a different principle to different children works. For example, if you leave the house in charge of your teen you may tell them, "Don't be bossy. Serve your younger sibling." But to the younger sibling you say, "Obey what your older sister tells you to do. Be helpful and have a good attitude." Telling

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the younger sibling to obey in no way means that the older should take advantage by issuing many commands.

Application: You may have a Christian boss. If so, do not take advantage of the mercy they show. Do not think, "I can show up late because they will forgive me." Their goodness is not something to be exploited. Instead, be an even better and more diligent employee, knowing that it is a member of God's own family you get to work for.

4. *Not with external service as those who merely please men* – This speaks to our primary motivation for the actions we take. Our motivations should not be centered on pleasing people. Trying to please people can get us into all kinds of problems. For example:

- Working diligently only while the boss is watching.
- Going to church to show others our spirituality.
- Doing acts of kindness to impress others.
- Cleaning our house only when other people come over.
- Reading the Bible more when we are being watched.
- Acting against our convictions in order to appease parents.
- Wanting an up-front role in the church so that others will appreciate us.

The list can go on and on. This is what the Pharisees were guilty of. Jesus strongly rebuked them for these sinful motivations in Matthew 6. Jesus said that those who did such spiritual things to be seen by others already received their full reward. They would get no approval or reward from God, instead winning only the approval of man. When it is all said and done, our choice comes down to the following question: would you rather please God or man?

5. *With sincerity of the heart, fearing the Lord* – Man looks at the outer appearance, but God looks at the heart (2 Samuel 16:7). As people, we tend to focus on the outer appearance. Many people seek to restore their relationship with God through good deeds, education, and religious rituals. All of these things make a person look good on the outside, but do nothing to solve the problem of our corrupted hearts. From these verses we need to learn to do two things.

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Firstly, we need to learn to evaluate our own heart motivation. Why do you make the choices you do? The fear of the Lord and a desire to please Him should be at the top of our list of motivations. If we truly learned to serve God from a sincere heart our lives would be truly transformed! How would this transform our lives?

- You would read the Bible not just to finish a plan or because someone is asking you if you read it. You would read it because you wanted to know God more!
- You would not be committing secret sins when no one is watching, because you would know that God is always watching.
- You would give to others out of a true desire to help them, not to be seen by men.
- Your face would not be a facade. You would not be appearing cheerful to others while complaining bitterly in your heart. Your face would instead be a window to the joy and peace truly present in your heart.
- You would obey with a cheerful attitude knowing that this is what God wants you to do.

There is famous book about raising children called *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp. It is a good book for parents who struggle with the command in verse 21 - not to exasperate you children and who want to teach children to obey from the heart for the right reasons.

But there should also be another book called *Shepherding Your Own Heart*. We sometimes allow ourselves to complain against others in our heart. When we see them, we talk cheerfully as if everything is normal and OK and then later, we allow sinful thoughts and a judgmental attitude to take over. Many employees are very agreeable to their bosses' face, but curse their boss behind his/her back.

Secondly, we need to learn not to judge others based on outer appearance. Instead get to the heart of the matter. Just as it is important to have the right motivations in our own heart, it is also important to not quickly judge others based on appearance. Next time you are tempted to judge others, try to fully understand the situation first. Try to put yourself into their shoes and understand why they think the way they do.

6. *Whatever you do, do your work heartily* – We should do our best in everything! Housework, disciplining children, our careers, sharing the gospel, serving at church, etc. must be done to the

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very best of our ability because we represent God to the world around us. We should not be doing these things grudgingly. We shouldn't be complaining.

Sometimes we get discouraged. You may be discouraged with your career. You hoped it would be easier or more profitable. You still need to do your best in your career for the Lord. Maybe you feel stuck doing lots of housework and the people you do it for are not grateful. You still need to do your best from your heart for the Lord. Maybe you are discouraged that ministry is not going as expected. People do not respond as you wish they would. Most people do not pay attention when you share with them and even people you thought were doing well, turn away. You must continue to do your best because you answer to God for your own actions. Follow Paul's instruction in Galatians 6:9 to not grow weary in doing good.

In what area or areas are you finding it difficult to do your work heartily? In what areas are you tempted to do the work for man?

7. *The reward is from the Lord* – Sometimes people ask the question, "Should we be motivated by rewards in heaven?" Based on this verse, what would you say? This verse, and others in the Bible, do seem to show that rewards are one thing which should motivate us. They should not be the only motivation, but they most certainly are one motivation. It is not wrong to pursue these rewards because if it was wrong God would not have used them to motivate us.

Every person is motivated by rewards. The problem is that we try to get them from the wrong person. When we seek the approval of people, any reward we get is earthly, temporary, and completely insignificant. Think about it for a minute. If a student does something which pleases his fellow student, but displeases his teacher what good is it? If a child does something which makes his brother laugh, but makes his parents upset, what good is it? We must please the right person.

And the right person is the Creator and judge. He is the Alpha and the Omega. Why would you want to please anyone else first? If you were a soldier in an army and could please the general or a lowly sergeant, who would you choose? And yet we still many times choose to please the people around us rather than God. Why? We are shortsighted and foolish. We look at things from an earthly perspective rather than an eternal perspective. This needs to change! How can you begin to change?

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8. *It is the Lord Christ whom you serve* – Is it? It should be. His opinion is the one that matters.

9. Verse 25 – He is the judge. God is not partial. We have seen that He is not partial toward the rich. He is not partial toward the poor either (Romans 2:11). God does not show favoritism. Each of us will stand before God to give an account of our own lives. And on that day, we will be without excuse. We will not be judged by what others did or thought, only for our own conduct. We may receive the consequences of what we have done now in this life in the form of discipline from God or the natural law of sowing and reaping. Or even worse, we may receive the consequences for what we have done in eternity. The good news is that Jesus gave His life for us so that we could be redeemed, saved from God's judgment. Let us pray and ask God to give us a clean heart. Let us ask for forgiveness for the areas we fall short and resolve, once again, to please our heavenly Master.
