

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING QUESTION

Imagine you're at work. Your boss is away for the day, and you've got a light schedule. Would you take the opportunity to skive today? Why/why not?

RECAP

According to 3:1-4, why should Christians be different?
And how does this link in with 2:6-7 and why Paul is writing this letter?

QUESTIONS

READ 3:17-4:1

On a big piece of paper, draw up this table.

Fill in what commands are given to each.

What patterns can you spot?

Why does 23-25 expand the simple one-verse-per-group pattern?

wives	husbands
children	parents/fathers
slaves	masters

List all the phrases in this passage which contain the word 'Lord' or 'Master' (- it's the same word in the Greek, so there's a kind of pun through 3:22-4:1)

Why might this be significant in *Colossians*?

Now give lots of time for working out some practicalities ...

Use these questions as starters (but think up others too):

- If you are married, how do you think 18-19 should work out in practise?
- Is 'love' the opposite of 'be harsh'? does that help in applying v19?
- How can parents (and especially fathers) discourage their children?
- cf <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/parents-require-obedience-of-your-children>
- How is 22-25 different from the attitudes of wage-earners in our society?
- Re-visit the Launching Question
- If we are in charge of others at work, how might 4:1 apply?
- etc
- etc

How should we be different after this study? (1 or 2 practical things each?)

What should be your reason for being different (according to *Colossians*)?

Colossians 3:18-4:1



Colossians at a glance

The church in Colossae was planted by someone called Epaphras, a 'fellow servant... a faithful minister of Christ' (1:7). Paul was so pleased to hear how they were growing. But he also wanted to warn them.

There may be/would be false teachers ('FTers') who might 'delude' them with their clever arguments (2:4), pulling them away from Jesus. The FTers would make Christians feel they weren't enjoying *everything* God had to offer.

Paul wrote this letter to remind them that actually they do have ... everything! All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, and Jesus fully fills every believer (2:9-10). It doesn't get fuller than that! When it comes to knowing God, being forgiven, growing in godliness, and arriving safely in glory, all we need is Jesus!

Paul's pastoral method is therefore to exalt Jesus: if we really grasp His supremacy and sufficiency (1:15-20), then that will help us to 'continue in the faith' (1:23), the hope of the gospel that God has made public and that Paul has been proclaiming so tirelessly (1:23; 2:3). That is exactly *why* Paul says all that he says about Jesus: 'in order that no-one may delude us'.

Because, of course, we still face the same potential delusions today. There are many sections of the Christian church that are similarly – and sadly – promoting a 'Jesus plus ...' gospel today. But if we attempt to add anything to all that Jesus already is, we will immediately diminish all that he really is.

Theme Sentence for 3:18-4:1

Christians continue in Jesus by having their minds set on what will matter in heaven ... in the home and at work.

Context

This section continues the practical outworking of 3:1-4, which (in turn) is explaining what it means to 'continue to walk in Jesus' (2:6-7). Continuing in Jesus means setting my heart/mind on what will matter in heaven 'where Jesus is' since he is all that matters (11). Perhaps surprisingly, what results is not something 'other-worldly', like the FTers' 'hollow and deceptive' spirituality (2:8-23), with all their weird and wonderful visions, asceticism and angel-worship ... but something very everyday. With an eternal perspective, I'll live with Jesus as:

- Lord over my private life 3:5-11
- Lord over my life at church 3:12-17
- Lord over my life at home 3:18-21
- Lord over my life at work 3:22-4:1
- Lord over my life in the world 4:2-6

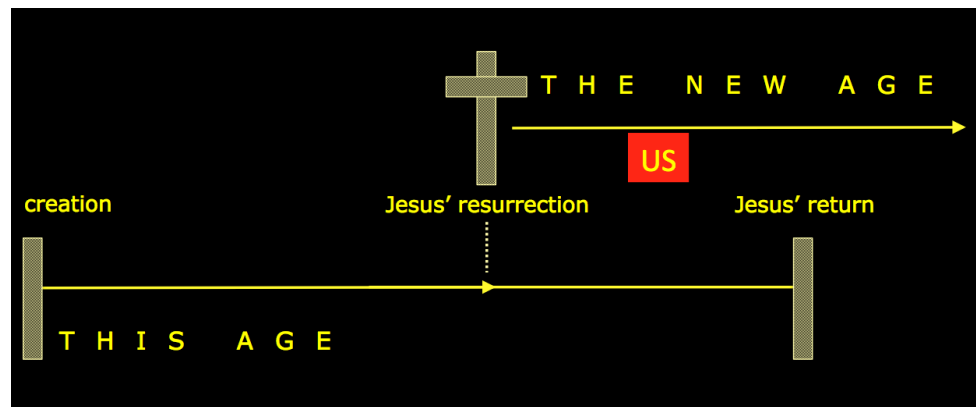
It's very striking that if you remove 'spirituality' from Jesus, then you remove it from the real world. If you stop setting your mind on things above, then you abandon ordinary human relationships on earth.

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Introduction

This paragraph applies the main point of 3:1-4 to my life at home and at work. To be a Christian (ie to have 'received Christ Jesus the Lord' 2:6-7) is to be 'raised with Christ'. Christians have a new life. But this new life remains invisible, hidden with Jesus in heaven, until his return when it will become visible to everyone. To use the idea from 1:18-20, Christians are in God's new creation. In this picture, we've swapped to the top line (... though we are physically still living in this age too, of course):



The next five paragraphs are working out the practical ways in which we continue to 'walk in him' (2:6), with Jesus as Christ and Lord. Its' all about 'New Age Spirituality' (!).

Commentary

We are to continue walking in Jesus, continue to be heaven-centred in every department of life, with no exceptions (17). This really is a spirituality for the kitchen sink!

Paul applies 'living with Jesus as Lord' to three sets of relationships (moving from the closest relationship in marriage, to the family, to the workplace). We may divide this into two (ie home and work), but it may be just one section, since these three relationships are probably under the same roof.

In each case:

- the relationship is submission (18) or obedience (20, 22) of the first to the second;
- the second has a reciprocal relationship: not harsh (18), provoking (20) or unfair (1);
- the motivation is what is fitting (18), pleasing (20), reverent/'fearing' (22) towards the Lord. 22-25 break this one-verse pattern to enlarge on the common motivation: it's not just that we want to please Jesus (which could become dangerously wishy-washy), it's also that we are to focus on what will matter in heaven (24-25), where our Master is (1). This is the same guiding principle as 3:1-4's 'set your minds on things above'.

The list is similar to other ancient 'household codes', where responsibilities or duties were spelt out for different members of a house (or of society in general). This has led some to say that this list (and 18 in particular!) was something for the C1st, but not for now. However, there are some important differences: 'household codes' didn't normally give the kind of motivation Paul gives here, and his is very carefully linked in to the context since 3:1-4 (ie being heaven-centred). In other words, this isn't just some C1st contemporary 'household code' scissors-and-pasted in here unthinkingly.

How then should we handle this passage (and particularly the controversial bits)? It's worth asking whether we will be reading this part of God's word to find new ways to please him, or to find a loophole! All of this chapter has been saying that we should be concerned for what is appropriate/natural for heaven, which may not necessarily be what is considered appropriate/natural for this age. If we feel a conflict of values, that may be similar to preferring to harbor bitterness about something/someone rather than to forgive them (13). 22b (eg) is very different to the attitudes of most wage-earners in our society!

Wives and husbands (18-19)

'Submit' does not entrench the wicked dominance of abusive husbands over their wives, but it does mean that the wife should forego the temptation to rule her husband's life (whether by direct or by underhand/manipulative means). Husbands are told to love (cf Eph 5:21-33 for a fuller statement of what this means), and not to be harsh when (eg) she turns out to be individually-minded, rather than a projection of his own fantasies.

Children and fathers (20-21)

Children are elevated here to full Christian status, and the way a child obeys Jesus is by obeying mum and dad! Fathers (and the word could mean 'parents') are not to 'provoke' (by things like nagging or belittling?) lest the spirit of the child is crushed.

Slaves and masters (22-4:1)

Employees are to do what they're paid to do (and not just for the boss' approval): 25 implies that laziness at work is a sin. Christian masters (= managers?) are slaves too, and justice in the workplace is their responsibility (and not the trades union?) (1).

We need 'all spiritual wisdom and understanding' to apply these broad principles so that we 'walk in a manner worthy of the Lord' (1:9-10). All of them beg the question '... and what will that actually look like, in practice?! Paul hasn't given us a list of rules covering every possible situation (since he's been clear that rules and regulations are something for this age rather than the age to come cf 2:20-23). BUT ... let's be practical in talking about this, thinking through the implications, and gently encouraging one another to change!

As we look ahead to *A Passion For Life*, it's good to be reminded that we are the best advert for the gospel. Yes, us! How we live in these nitty-gritty areas of personal relationship is how the glorious gospel of Jesus' reconciling death is seen to be life-transforming, and thoroughly wholesome.