

# Role Call

## Colossians 3:18-21

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#### I. Wife Col. 3:18 cf.; Eph 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1

##### a. Wives

- i. Wives are addressed first (as in Eph. 5:22; in 1 Pet. 3:1 following slaves, but before husbands). It is important to note that it is wives and not women generally who are in view (as also in 1 Cor. 14:34). Women who were single, widowed, or divorced and of independent means could evidently function as heads of their own households, as in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15), Phoebe, the first named “deacon” in Christian history and patron of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1–2), Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), and presumably Nympha in Colossae itself (see on 4:15).

##### b. Subject

- i. Subject - to cause to be in a submissive relationship
  1. In the middle voice, it describes a voluntary submission which resembles that of Christian humility
  2. to arrange under 2 to subject, put in subjection. 3 to subject one's self, obey. 4 to submit to one's control. 5 to yield to one's admonition or advice.
  3. neither should its significance be exaggerated; “subjection” means “subordination,” not “subjugation”
  4. Naturally, some express concern about the wife having a seemingly inferior role. Such thinking is unbiblical and a misunderstanding of these passages. [First, since Paul used the term of Jesus' attitude who is Lord of all \(see 1 Cor 15:28\), the term may be appropriately used of one with the highest office.](#) Both wives and husbands must recognize that the term has nothing to do with personal worth and value. Second, Paul described a functional situation which reflects God's plan for families on this earth. He was not speaking ontologically, that is, regarding the essence of personhood. There is a functional subordination, but an essential equality. Differences of roles to accomplish specific functions do not call for the categories of superior and inferior. It is better to speak of “suited for” and “not suited for.” Such an economic division is found in God, where the Father, Son, and Spirit each have different operations (functional

subordination), but they are all equally divine (essential equality). Thus Christian relationships on earth are patterned after those in God, and both husbands and wives should endeavor to understand their roles in that light.

5. Submission is voluntarily assuming a particular role because it is right. Obedience is not directly commanded. Submission demands obedience as a pattern, but there are times in which obedience to a husband may become disobedience to God. By using the word “submit,” Paul separated the kind of obedience expected by the wife from that expected of others. The wife has a very different relationship to her husband than children to parents or slaves to masters.
6. 1 Peter 3:1 - Voluntary submission is in view here
  - a. In both cases he commends submission, but in neither instance does he endorse the patriarchal institution that enforces submission
  - ii. Won without a word 1 Peter 3:1
- c. Fitting to the Lord
  - i. Fitting - to reach a point of connection, w. focus on what is appropriate
    1. The unsuitable nature of an action is shown by the fact that those who perform it are ἄγιοι acting ἐν κυρίῳ. This unsuitability may concur with the judgment of the world (Col. 3:18)
    2. to be fitting, to be right
    3. The motivation for voluntary submission is that it is a proper Christian attitude. The phrase “as is fitting in the Lord” identifies these concerns. The word “fitting” has the idea of proper as a duty. By employing the statement, Paul made it clear that such submission is an outworking of the lordship of Christ. It is part of the Christian order.
    4. Submission is a matter of Christian commitment. It comes with salvation. Voluntarily taking a position of submission is a matter of a wife’s relationship to the Lord, not to her husband. It is “fitting in the Lord.”
  - ii. As to the Lord Eph 5:22
- d. Respect Ephesians 5:33
  - i. Respect - to have a profound measure of respect
  - ii. If in contrast to Prov. 24:21 a distinction is made between respect for the king and fear of God, in typical relationships of subordination, e.g., wives in 1 Pt. 3:2; Eph. 5:33, and slaves in 1 Pt. 2:18; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22, fear can denote the obedience demanded by the superior authority of masters or husbands as lords. This fear as a sign of entire dependence on the power of the stronger requires humility from the slave even to the point of suffering unjust treatment

- iii. The same applies to wives. Certainly these are to expect love from their husbands rather than anger (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33) and yet they are still to fear in subordination, for they owe this to their exemplary walk (1 Pt. 3:2) or to their husbands ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ (Eph. 5:22, cf. 33). This traditional theme (→ 193, 14 ff.) of subordination is part of the general structure of the household tables, so that it can also be applied to the community in general: ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ, Eph. 5:21. Yet just because φόβος is due to Christ, the intention of these admonitions does not lie in principal devotion but in the demand for a pure and patient and gentle heart, Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5; 1 Pt. 3:2, 4.

## II. Husband Col. 3:19; Eph. 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7

### a. Love

- i. Love - to have a warm regard for and interest in another, *cherish, have affection for, attitude towards*
  - 1. He submits by leaving his own desires and taking her concerns as his own. While this dynamic helps define the husband's love, it should be noted that the text does not call the husband's responsibility "submission," nor does it state that Christ submitted to the church. The text calls it "love." In the dynamics of Christian relationships, a husband's loving, caring, sacrificial approach to his wife's well-being makes her responsibility of submission easier
  - 2. The command, therefore, appears to be a distinctively Christian element of the marriage relationship. It was common, of course, for husbands to love their wives sexually, but Paul advocated much more than that. In his description of the husband's love in Eph 5:22ff., he clearly stated that the husband was to love his wife sacrificially. Her inner beauty and self-fulfillment were to be his delight, and he would do whatever he could to promote her personal well-being and satisfaction. The model is Christ's love for the church.
  - 3. It seems clear, as some point out, that the husband submits to the wife by loving her and caring for her needs
- ii. As Christ Loved the Church Ephesians 5:25
  - 1. Gave Himself up
  - 2. Love their own body (Love her/Love himself) Eph 5:33
    - a. The discussion is briefer than that of Eph 5:22ff., where the major portion of the instructions for marriage are directed to the husband's care for his wife. There the command to love was developed more fully. Here Paul simply stated it.
- iii. Embittered
  - 1. to cause bitter feelings, *embitter, make bitter*

2. But the passive voice here presumably implies that the bitterness is experienced by the husbands. What is in view, therefore, is probably the feeling of the dominant partner who can legally enforce his will on his wife but who will not thereby win her love and respect and can thus feel cheated and embittered at not receiving what he regards as his due
3. Since Paul issued the command here, he probably meant that the marriage relationship could become an irritant to the one who does not love properly. The husband was to take care to see that bitterness did not develop.

b. Live 1 Peter 3:7

- i. Live - to live in close association with, *live with*
  1. to be intimate with in a sexual manner, *to have intercourse*
- ii. Understand way
  1. Understanding – *knowledgeably*
    - a. It is in keeping that this Christian knowledge is not a fixed possession but develops in the life of the Christian as lasting obedience and reflection
    - b. If the theoretical element determines the concept, the practical consequences are always implied. It is characteristic that the guiding factor is not interest in Christian learning but the edification of the community which is to be advanced by the *γνώσις* of the individual
    - c. Most English versions translate the verse so that husbands are exhorted to be considerate and kind in their relationship with their wives. Such a reading is not incorrect, but it shifts the focus slightly away from the meaning of the text. I understand the phrase “according to knowledge” (*kata gnōsin*), like “in fear” (literal translation) in 3:2 and “conscious of God” in 2:19, to refer to the relationship of husbands to God. Husbands, then, should live together with wives informed by the knowledge of God’s will, of what he demands them to do
  2. Weaker
    - a. female vulnerability and common Christian hope
    - b. to experiencing some incapacity or limitation, *weak*
      - i. of physical weakness.
      - ii. In the NT the words are hardly ever used of purely physical weakness, but frequently a. in the comprehensive sense of the whole man
      - iii. Nothing else in the New Testament suggests that women are intellectually inferior, nor is it clear that women are weaker emotionally, for in many ways the vulnerability of women in sharing their

emotions and feelings demonstrates that they are more courageous and stronger than men emotionally. Nor did Peter suggest that women are weaker morally or spiritually than men. Such a view would suggest that men are actually better Christians than women, which is not taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, nor is it evident in history. The most obvious meaning, therefore, is that women are weaker than men in terms of sheer strength. Peter used the word for “female” or “woman” (*gynaikeios*) rather than “wife.” He directed attention to what is uniquely feminine about women, pointing husbands to the knowledge that God would require them to have of the female sex.

iii. Honor

1. *Honor* - the respect that one enjoys, *honor* as a possession
  - a. the obligation of loving regard
  - b. is the respect which is to be shown to the wife, to which she has a claim as a creature of God. In R. 13:7 the apostle asks of Christians that they should concede to all men what they owe them
  - c. Men should honor women because they share the same destiny—an eternal inheritance in God’s kingdom

2. Fellow heir

iv. Prayers will not be hindered

1. God will refuse to answer

### III. Children Col. 3:20-21; Eph. 6: 1,4

a. Obedience

i. Obedience - to follow instructions, *obey, follow, be subject*

1. Paul commanded children to “obey.” The word “obey” (*hypakouō*) is stronger than the word “submit,” used of wives earlier

ii. In all things

1. The text reinforces this by the use of the phrase “in everything.” Obedience was expected. In Eph 6:2–3 Paul stated that doing so was a fulfillment of the Ten Commandments and qualified the children for the reception of a promise

iii. Well – Pleasing – acceptable

1. The motivation occurs at the end of this verse: “for this pleases the Lord.” Two parts of this expression stress the Christian motivation. First, the word “pleases” almost always describes the relationship to the Lord. It conveys the thought of “well pleasing”

iv. For this right Eph 6:1-2

1. Right- to being in accordance with high standards of rectitude, *upright, just, fair*
2. Commandment
3. Live Long on earth

b. Fathers

i. Fathers

1. The term may easily encompass both father and mother, as it does here, but it also served to remind them that the fathers bore a primary responsibility for the children in the home. Paul meant that they should not embitter or irritate their children. The word “embitter” (*erethizō*) occurs only one other time in Scripture (in 2 Cor 9:2). This speaks of an irritation or even nagging. Parents embitter children by constantly picking at them, perhaps refusing to acknowledge their efforts. The fact that children might become discouraged suggests that the parents too easily reminded the children that they were not good enough. This activity had no place in the Christian home. If correction were needed, it should have been toward the behavior of the child, not the child’s personhood, and it should have been enforced quickly. Discipline was not to be prolonged so that nagging occurred.

ii. Not exasperate

1. A child frequently irritated by over-severity or injustice, to which, nevertheless, it must submit, acquires a spirit of sullen resignation, leading to despair

iii. Does not lose heart

1. In Colossians, Paul warned parents not to discourage their children.

# Word Studies

Subject -

Fitting –

Love –

Embittered –

Live

Understanding

**ἰδίους**, prefixed in Rec. Text to ἀνδράσιν, has but slight support, and has probably come from Eph. 5:22.

ὥς ἀνῆκεν, imperfect, as often in Greek writers with similar verbs. Comp. Eph. 5:4, ἃ οὐκ ἀνῆκεν; Acts 22:22, οὐ γὰρ καθῆκεν αὐτὸν ζῆν. It is not implied here that the duty has not hitherto been rightly performed, but only that the obligation existed previously.

The use of the past tense in the English “ought” is not quite parallel, since the present “owe” cannot be used in this sense.

**ἐν Κυρίῳ** is to be joined with ἀνῆκεν, not with ὑποτάσσεσθε; see ver. 20, εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν Κυρίῳ, “for those who are in the Lord.”

**19. οἱ ἄνδρες, κ.τ.λ.** = Eph. 5:25.

**μὴ πικραίνεσθε.** “Become not embittered,” or rather, as this would seem to imply a lasting temper, “show no bitterness.” The word occurs frequently in classical writers. Plato has (*Legg.* 731 D), τὸν θυμὸν πραῦναι κ. μὴ ἀκραχολοῦντα, γυναικείως πικραίνον μενον, διατελεῖν; Pseudo-Dem. 1464, μηδενὶ μήτε πικραίνεσθαι μήτε μνησικακεῖν. The adjective πικρός is used by Euripides in a strikingly illustrative passage, *Helen.* 303, ὅταν πόσις πικρὸς ξυνῇ γυναικί ... θανεῖν κράτιστον. Plutarch observes that it shows weakness of mind when men πρὸς γυναῖκα διαπικραίνονται. Philo uses πικραίνεσθαι of just anger. *De Vita Moysis*, ii. pp. 135, 20, and 132, 34. The word would seem, then, to correspond more nearly with the colloquial “cross” than with “bitter.”

**20. τὰ τέκνα, κ.τ.λ.** See Eph. 6:1. Disobedience to parents is mentioned as a vice of the heathen, Rom. 1:30, κατὰ πάντα. There would be no propriety in suggesting the possibility in a Christian family of a conflict between duty to parents and duty to God.

**εὐάρεστον** There is no need to supply τῷ Θεῷ the adjective is taken absolutely, like προσφιλεῖ in Phil. 4:8, and is sufficiently defined by ἐν Κυρίῳ. In Rom. 12:2 εὐάρεστου seems also to be absolute, τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρ. καὶ τέλειον<sup>1</sup>

**21. μὴ ἐρεθίζετε.** “Do not irritate.” The verb means to “excite, provoke,” not necessarily to anger, or in a bad sense; and in 2 Cor. 9:2 it is used in a good sense.

There is another reading, παροργίζετε, very strongly supported, being read in  $\kappa$  ACD\*GKL *al.* Euthal. (Tisch<sup>2</sup>. cod.), Theodoret (cod.), Theoph.

ἐρεθίζετε is read in B D<sup>bo</sup>K, most MSS<sup>3</sup>., Syr. (both, but Harc<sup>4</sup>I marg. has the other reading), Clem., Chrys.

παροργίζετε occurs in the parallel Eph. 4:4 (with no variety), and to this is obviously due its introduction here.

**ἵνα μὴ ἄθυμῶσιν.** “That they may not lose heart.” “*Fractus animus pestis juventutis*,” Bengel. A child frequently irritated by over-severity or injustice, to which, nevertheless, it must submit, acquires a spirit of sullen resignation, leading to despair.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians\*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1909), 293.

<sup>2</sup>Tisch. Tischendorf.

<sup>3</sup>MSS. manuscripts

<sup>4</sup>HarcI The Harclean Syriac.



# Commentary Studies

## *Wives (3:18)*

**3:18** Starting with the most basic of domestic relationships, Paul addressed the wives' behavior. The wives were to submit to their husbands. The command occurs consistently in the New Testament guidelines so that there is a uniform attitude on the matter. The term means "to subject or subordinate."<sup>657</sup> The verb form occurs thirty-eight times in the New Testament, twenty-three times in the Pauline literature, but only one time in Colossians. There appears to be a difference in the specific nuance of the term according to the voice in which it occurs (active or middle voice).<sup>668</sup> When it occurs in the active voice, the power to subject belongs to God himself. This is evidenced in 1 Cor 15:24–28 (Christ subjecting all things); Phil 3:21; Rom 8:20; Eph 1:21–22. In the middle voice, it describes a voluntary submission which resembles that of Christian humility. It may describe Christ's submission to God (1 Cor 15:58), church members to one another (Eph 5:21, a parallel context to this one), believers submitting in the exercise of their prophetic gifts (1 Cor 14:32), or the proper order for wives (Eph 5:22ff.; Col 3:18). This latter use appeals to free agents to take a place of submission voluntarily. The term does not suggest slavery or servitude, and certainly never calls for the husband to make his wife submit. If he could, her heart would not be in it. Besides, Paul addressed wives here, not husbands. In this context, the word differs radically from the word which describes the role of children and slaves who are to obey (*hypakouō*).

In comparing this command with Eph 5:22ff., a more holistic picture emerges of the relationship Paul advocated. It has been suggested based on Eph 5:21–22 that there is a mutual submission of husband and wife. While that idea contains an important relational principle of mutual consideration, the text speaks against that. Ephesians 5:21 introduces domestic relationships by the participial form of the verb "submit." It is an evidence of the filling of the Spirit. As the text develops, however, only three of the six receive the command to submit: wives, children, and slaves. It seems clear, as some point out, that the husband submits to the wife by loving her and caring for her needs; but, it should be noted, Paul did not directly call that submission. Admittedly, Ephesians needs clarification, and that occurs in Colossians. In Col 3:18 Paul directly called upon the wives to submit, and the text does not use the word in relation to the husband at all.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> BAGD, 847–48. The middle means to subject oneself.

<sup>668</sup> This distinction is recognized in BAGD, 847–48, where it is called active and passive, but most explicitly in M. Barth, *Ephesians, Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, AB (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 709–15.

<sup>769</sup> The point is that consistently in Scripture the wife is to submit to the husband. The only passage which could be interpreted to suggest "mutual submission" is Eph 5:21ff., which many have allowed to become the standard for interpreting all others. The others, however, do not support that interpretation. Each passage must be studied in harmony

A second matter to note is that in each passage the wife's submission is different from the others. Children and slaves are told to obey; the wife is not. Submission is voluntarily assuming a particular role because it is right. Obedience is not directly commanded. Submission demands obedience as a pattern, but there are times in which obedience to a husband may become disobedience to God.<sup>780</sup> By using the word "submit," Paul separated the kind of obedience expected by the wife from that expected of others. The wife has a very different relationship to her husband than children to parents or slaves to masters.

The motivation for voluntary submission is that it is a proper Christian attitude. The phrase "as is fitting in the Lord" identifies these concerns. The word "fitting" has the idea of proper as a duty.<sup>791</sup> By employing the statement, Paul made it clear that such submission is an outworking of the lordship of Christ. It is part of the Christian order.

As before, this phrase clarifies a common misunderstanding in Eph 5:22. The phrase "as to the Lord" sometimes bears the interpretation that the wife's relationship to her husband is to be patterned after her relationship to the Lord. Thus a husband may claim that the wife must obey him totally in the same way that she does the Lord. Conversely, some wives have claimed that the phrase means that they submit to their husbands only when their husbands act like the Lord. In times when the husband fails, it is not necessary for the wife to submit. Both of these interpretations miss Paul's point. Submission is a matter of Christian commitment. It comes with salvation. Voluntarily taking a position of submission is a matter of a wife's relationship to the Lord, not to her husband. It is "fitting in the Lord."

Naturally, some express concern about the wife having a seemingly inferior role. Such thinking is unbiblical and a misunderstanding of these passages. First, since Paul used the term of Jesus' attitude who is Lord of all (see 1 Cor 15:28), the term may be appropriately used of one with the highest office. Both wives and husbands must recognize that the term has nothing to do with personal worth and value. Second, Paul described a functional situation which reflects God's plan for families on this earth.<sup>7102</sup> He was not speaking ontologically, that is, regarding the essence of personhood. There is a functional subordination, but an essential equality. Differences of roles to accomplish specific functions do not call for the categories of superior and inferior. It is better to speak of "suited for" and "not suited for." Such an economic division is found in God, where the Father, Son, and Spirit each have different operations

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for a complete understanding of the others and for a complete understanding of proper Christian interpersonal relationships.

<sup>870</sup> E.g., such cases involve immorality, cruelty, and improper conduct. The guideline then is to obey God rather than a husband. Even then, however, the commitment must be to submission to God's plan as a pattern of life and the best order for society.

<sup>971</sup> The Greek is ἀνῆκεν. *BAGD*, 66.

<sup>1072</sup> The term "functional" refers to the administration of affairs and the organization of tasks for proper operation.

(functional subordination), but they are all equally divine (essential equality).<sup>7113</sup> Thus Christian relationships on earth are patterned after those in God, and both husbands and wives should endeavor to understand their roles in that light.<sup>7124</sup>

### *Husbands (3:19)*

The counterpart of the wife's responsibility is that of the husband's. In direct, simple, and clear terms, Paul expressed the duties of a Christian husband. The discussion is briefer than that of Eph 5:22ff., where the major portion of the instructions for marriage are directed to the husband's care for his wife. There the command to love was developed more fully. Here Paul simply stated it. He did add to the words found there, however, when he said that husbands were not to be bitter toward their wives. This verse naturally falls into two divisions: Husbands, love your wives; and do not be bitter toward them.

**3:19** The simple, positive command is to love. The term *agapē*, used here, never occurred in secular household tables.<sup>7135</sup> The command, therefore, appears to be a distinctively Christian element of the marriage relationship. It was common, of course, for husbands to love their wives sexually, but Paul advocated much more than that. In his description of the husband's love in Eph 5:22ff., he clearly stated that the husband was to love his wife sacrificially. Her inner beauty and self-fulfillment were to be his delight, and he would do whatever he could to promote her personal well-being and satisfaction. The model is Christ's love for the church.

Some have suggested that the husband's love for the wife is his submission to her.<sup>7146</sup> He submits by leaving his own desires and taking her concerns as his own. While this dynamic helps define the husband's love, it should be noted that the text does not call the husband's responsibility "submission," nor does it state that Christ submitted to the church. The text calls

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<sup>1173</sup> Scripture generally assigns different roles to the three persons of the Godhead. The Father plans, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies. Each, however, is fully God.

<sup>1274</sup> Lohse understands the passage to mean that Christian wives were to adapt to the prevailing social order of the day. He implied that the term "submit" was frequently used of marriage relationships outside the New Testament (157). O'Brien, however, disputes this assumption, claiming that there are only two instances of the word used for wife/husband relationships apart from Scripture (*Colossians*, *Philemon*, 221). Paul called the Christians to a standard and pattern of behavior which was not necessarily well accepted even for that day.

<sup>1375</sup> O'Brien states, "They do not occur in any extrabiblical Hellenistic rules for the household" (223).

<sup>1476</sup> They base this on the assumption that Ephesians calls for a mutual submission. This is difficult to derive from the text (see note 69).

it “love.” In the dynamics of Christian relationships, a husband’s loving, caring, sacrificial approach to his wife’s well-being makes her responsibility of submission easier.<sup>7157</sup>

Paul followed the positive command to love with a negative one, “Do not be harsh with them.” This term does not occur in other ethical lists.<sup>7168</sup> The word is followed by the preposition “toward” (*pros*) which also is unusual.<sup>7179</sup>

Since Paul issued the command here, he probably meant that the marriage relationship could become an irritant to the one who does not love properly. The husband was to take care to see that bitterness did not develop.

#### CHILDREN AND PARENTS (3:20–21)

Moving from the innermost family circle, Paul addressed the parent-child relationship. As before, his cryptic comments express only the heart of what he provided in more extended fashion in Eph. 6:1–4.

#### *Children (3:20)*

**3:20** Again Paul spoke to the one who was to submit first. Because he addressed children, he must have expected children to be present when the text was read aloud in the congregation. The church meeting included people of all stations in life. Race, age, and economic standing paled in significance when people were in Christ.

Paul commanded children to “obey.” The word “obey” (*hypakouō*) is stronger than the word “submit,” used of wives earlier.<sup>8180</sup> The text reinforces this by the use of the phrase “in everything.” Obedience was expected. In Eph 6:2–3 Paul stated that doing so was a fulfillment of the Ten Commandments and qualified the children for the reception of a promise.<sup>8191</sup>

From the two lists, Paul apparently was addressing young children here. Two factors inform this interpretation. First, the use of the term “children” rather than “young men” (or equivalent) shows Paul was addressing younger children.<sup>8202</sup> Second, in Eph 6:4 fathers were told to “bring

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<sup>1577</sup> In light of this discussion, the husband’s love or lack of it does not relieve the woman of her responsibility toward him. Nor does the wife’s lack of submission relieve the husband of his responsibility toward her.

<sup>1678</sup> The term is *πικραίνω*. It does occur elsewhere in the New Testament, but not in these contexts (e.g., Eph 4:31 and the noun in Heb 12:14).

<sup>1779</sup> “Toward,” *πρός*, means in the relationship, but several commentators have suggested it does not mean “with her” but “because of her,” i.e., because of the marriage.

<sup>1880</sup> This may be surmised from the definition of the two terms *ὑποτάσσω* and *ὑπακούω*, and from the use of the active voice here rather than the middle of *ὑποτάσσω*.

<sup>1981</sup> There he quoted Exod 20:12 and Deut 15:16.

<sup>2082</sup> This would have been strengthened if Paul had used the term *τεκνία* instead of *τέκνα*, as John did in 1 John 2:12, although there it appears to be a nuance of the word

them up.” The training process involved teaching children how to obey, and those who heard these words would respond properly. Nothing in the text suggests a specific age, however. The term “children” primarily describes children in relation to their parents, so the assumption is that they were at home and under the parents’ supervision.<sup>8213</sup>

The motivation occurs at the end of this verse: “for this pleases the Lord.” Two parts of this expression stress the Christian motivation. First, the word “pleases” almost always describes the relationship to the Lord. It conveys the thought of “well pleasing.”<sup>8224</sup> Second, the phrase “in the Lord” occurs. This means “since you are in the Lord.” It calls the child to remember the state of grace and the responsibilities that grow from it.<sup>8235</sup> Thus the children have a responsibility in the Christian family order. To be pleasing to the Lord as Christians, they should obey their parents.

#### *Parents (3:21)*

**3:21** In the Lord, parents have a mutual responsibility to children. There is a command and a practical reason. Parents are told not to embitter their children. Paul used the term “fathers” in addressing the parents. The term may easily encompass both father and mother, as it does here, but it also served to remind them that the fathers bore a primary responsibility for the children in the home. Paul meant that they should not embitter or irritate their children. The word “embitter” (*erethizō*) occurs only one other time in Scripture (in 2 Cor 9:2). This speaks of an irritation or even nagging. Parents embitter children by constantly picking at them, perhaps refusing to acknowledge their efforts. The fact that children might become discouraged suggests that the parents too easily reminded the children that they were not good enough. This activity had no place in the Christian home. If correction were needed, it should have been toward the behavior of the child, not the child’s personhood, and it should have been enforced quickly. Discipline was not to be prolonged so that nagging occurred.

The reason for the command was to avoid discouragement. Constant nagging produces a situation where children are discouraged either because they cannot please those they love or because they feel they are of no worth to anybody.

In this case, Ephesians and Colossians complement each other by presenting two sides of the issue. In Ephesians, Paul exhorted the parents to raise the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This suggests a positive, Christian environment in which children will appreciate the Christian commitment of the parents. In time, children should believe in the Lord and mature in the Christian life and world view. In Colossians, Paul warned parents not to discourage their children. Especially in the child-rearing process, fathers were to embody

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which is endearing rather than pointing to age. Paul used that term only once, Gal 4:19, when he addressed his spiritual offspring. John used the term “young men” (νεανίσκος), but it never occurs in the Pauline literature.

<sup>2183</sup> BAGD states that the term is literally a “child in relation to father and mother” (808).

<sup>2284</sup> Noted by the εὖ prefix to the word. One location of this is Rom 12:1–2.

<sup>2385</sup> See N. Turner, *Syntax, A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ed. J. H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 263.

Christian principles and remember the equality of all persons in Christ. In God's sight, children and parents have equal worth, and parents were to treat their children with respect as persons.<sup>24</sup>

**3:18** αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὡς ἀνήκεν ἐν κυρίῳ. Wives are addressed first (as in Eph. 5:22; in 1 Pet. 3:1 following slaves, but before husbands). It is important to note that it is wives and not women generally who are in view (as also in 1 Cor. 14:34). Women who were single, widowed, or divorced and of independent means could evidently function as heads of their own households, as in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15), Phoebe, the first named “deacon” in Christian history and patron of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1–2), Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), and presumably Nympha in Colossae itself (see on 4:15). The concern here is primarily for the household unit (Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 251), with the implication that for Christians, too, its good ordering was fundamental to well-ordered human and social relationships. That wives are addressed first is presumably also a recognition that their relationship to their husbands was the linchpin of a stable and effective household.

The call for wives to be subject (ὑποτάσσομαι, “subject oneself, be subordinate to”) is unequivocal, not even lightened by the prefixed call “Be subject to one another,” or the addition

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<sup>24</sup> Richard R. Melick, [\*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon\*](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 311–315.

“as the church is subject to Christ” (as in Eph. 5:21, 24).<sup>1256</sup> The exhortation should not be weakened in translation in deference to modern sensibilities (cf. again 1 Cor. 14:34; so rightly Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* 119). But neither should its significance be exaggerated; “subjection” means “subordination,” not “subjugation” (Schrage, *Ethics* 253; so also Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 251–52). The teaching simply reflects the legal state of affairs, under Roman law at least, whereby the *paterfamilias* had absolute power over the other members of the family (*OC<sup>26</sup>D* s.v. “patria potestas”). And while there were variations in Greek and Jewish law, the basic fact held true throughout the Mediterranean world that the household was essentially a patriarchal institution, with other members of the household subject to the authority of its male head (Verner 27–81). The exhortation here, therefore, simply conforms to current mores; the term itself is used by Plutarch, *Conjugalia praecepta* 33 (= *Moralia* 142E) and pseudo-Callisthenes 1.22.4 (in Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 157 n. 18; *RA<sup>27</sup>C* 4.696; *NDIE<sup>28</sup>C* 1.36; see also Müller 292–98; Schrage, *Ethics* 254). In contemporary legal terms the submission called for was of a piece with that called for in Rom. 13:1, 5 (cf. Tit. 2:5 with 3:1).<sup>1297</sup> Those who, on the one hand, wish to criticize Paul and the first Christians for such conformity at this point should recall that it is only in the last hundred years of European civilization that the perception of the status of wives (and women) and their expected roles has been radically changed. Those who, on the other hand, wish to draw normative patterns of conduct from Scripture cannot ignore the degree to which the instruction simply reflects current social patterns, an unavoidably conformist rather than transformist ethic (cf. Conzelmann 153).

The one distinctively Christian feature is the additional words “as is fitting in the Lord” (Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 128; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 162, 164). Ἀνήκει (“it is fitting”) reflects the typical Stoic idea that one’s best policy, indeed one’s duty, was

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<sup>2516</sup> G. Delling, *TDNT* 8.45 reads Col. 3:18 as though the Eph. 5:21 and 24 qualifications were in mind there. 1 Cor. 16:6 shows that the word could be used of voluntary submission, but it is not clear that a distinctive Christian note is sounded here in the word itself (as O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 220–22, and those cited by him seem to want; contrast Kamlah, “Υποτάσσεσθαι” 241–42—a Jewish root); that surely comes with the ἐν κυρίῳ (Merk 215). The term itself (ὑποτάσσομαι) became the major theme of later codes (Crouch 34 and n. 94).

<sup>26</sup> *OCD* N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, ed., *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970)

<sup>27</sup> *RAC Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*

<sup>28</sup> *NDIEC New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, ed. G. H. R. Horsley, et al. (Macquarie University, 1981–)

<sup>2917</sup> In theological terms cf. the subjection of Christ to God (1 Cor. 15:28); with which in turn cf. 1 Cor. 11:3 and again Eph. 5:23–24.

to live in harmony with the natural order of things (H. Schlier, *TDN*<sup>30</sup> 1.360 and 3.437–40), a sentiment shared by Hellenistic Judaism and the early Gentile mission (*Aristeas* 227; pseudo-Phocylides 80; Rom. 1:28; Eph. 5:4; Phm. 8; 1 *Clement* 1:3)<sup>318</sup>—in this case, once again reflecting a patriarchal view of human society. But “in the Lord” implies a different perspective (*pace* Müller 310–16). It reflects both the claim that Christ is the fullest expression of the creative wisdom within the cosmos (1:15–20; 2:3) and the thematic statement that life should be lived in accordance with the traditions received regarding Jesus as Christ and Lord (2:6–7)—allusions lost in translations like “that is your Christian duty” (NE<sup>32</sup>B/RE<sup>33</sup>B; cf. GN<sup>34</sup>B).

The full phrase can function in two ways, either as an affirmation that husband headship of the household is “fitting” also within the community of those who own Jesus as Lord (Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 163–64) or as a qualification that only that degree of subjection to the husband which is “fitting in the Lord” is to be countenanced. That the latter is not merely a modern reading of the exhortation can be deduced from the counsel provided by Paul earlier in 1 Cor. 7:15 and from the fact that it was Christian pressure which took the power away from fathers to expose unwanted infants some three centuries later (in 374; earlier Jewish and Christian protest in pseudo-Phocylides 185; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.110; *Barnabas* 19:5). So now for a continuing Christian moral code we may say that “as is fitting in the Lord” is the fixed point while the limits of acceptable conduct within society are contingent on public sentiment of region and epoch (cf. Schweizer, *Colossians* 222).

**3:19** οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς. The corresponding responsibility of the husband is to love his wife. The ideal of a husband being tenderly solicitous for his wife was not distinctively Christian (classic expression in Musonius, *Orationes* 13A),<sup>359</sup> though how far reality matched the ideal in either case we are not in a position now to say. But again a distinctive Christian note comes through in the use of the verb ἀγαπάω, which, as elsewhere in the Paulines (Rom. 8:37; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4; 5:2, 25), gains its characteristic emphasis from Christ’s self-giving on the cross (see on 1:4 and 3:14).<sup>2360</sup> Thus

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<sup>30</sup>*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

<sup>318</sup> See further Crouch 37–73, 98–99.

<sup>32</sup>NEB New English Bible

<sup>33</sup>REB Revised English Bible

<sup>34</sup>GNB Good News Bible

<sup>3519</sup> In C. E. Lutz, “Musonius Rufus: ‘The Roman Socrates,’ ” *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947) 3–147, here 88–89.

<sup>3620</sup> O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 223, rightly refutes the claim of Crouch 111–13 (also Schulz 568–69; Wolter 199) that what is in view here is “the normal, human love of a husband for his wife”; see also Schrage, “Haustafeln” 12–15; Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*



ἀγαπάω plays the role in 3:19 of “in the Lord” in 3:18 and 20 and is itself sufficient to refer the reader back to the traditions of Jesus as the Christ and Lord (2:6–7). This is one of the points in the parallel treatment of Ephesians at which the author “takes off” into a lyrical account of the love of Christ for his church (Eph. 5:25–33). The allusion to Christ as the model of love in action, it is true, did not alter the subordinate role attributed to the wife in 3:18, however much it might have conditioned that role and prevented abuse of the power of the *paterfamilias*. But it does remain significant that the talk here is not of authority and rights but of obligations and responsibilities (Schrage, “Haustafeln” 15). “It is humility and kindness, not superiority of status ... which ought to dictate the conduct of the baptized” (Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 253).

The verb πικραίνω (only here in the Paulines) is a vivid one. It comes from πικρός, which, from an original meaning of “pointed, sharp,” gained the particular sense of “sharp, bitter” to the taste (W. Michaelis, *TDN*<sup>37</sup> 6.122; cf. Ruth 1:13, 20; Eph. 4:31; Heb. 12:15; Jas. 3:11); in *Hermas*, *Mandates* 10.2.3 it is the effect of ill-temper (ὀξύχολία). To be πικρός, “bitter, harsh,” is a characteristic regularly attributed to a tyrannical overlordship (Wolter 199, citing Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 106, 120; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.210; 2.277; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 7.3; Diogenes Laertius 4.46). Here, thus, we find the term used of the husband, rather than, as some might think more suitable, of the wife to describe her state under a harsh overlordship (as in 2 Kgs. 14:26). Most translate “Do not be harsh with them” (RS<sup>38</sup>V, NE<sup>39</sup>B/RE<sup>40</sup>B, NI<sup>41</sup>V, GN<sup>42</sup>B). But the passive voice here presumably implies that the bitterness is experienced by the husbands. What is in view, therefore, is probably the feeling of the dominant partner who can legally enforce his will on his wife but who will not thereby win her love and respect and can thus feel cheated and embittered at not receiving what he regards as his due (cf. Plutarch, *De cohibenda ira* 8 = *Moralia* 457A, cited in Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 158 n. 30). This is the likely outcome for anyone who stands on his rights alone and who knows and exercises little of the love called for in the first half of the verse.

**3:20** τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα, τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ. The legal status of children under Roman law was still more disadvantaged. Technically speaking, they were the property of the father; so, for example, the formalities for adoption

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218. For the different language of other household rules see Schweizer, *Colossians* 222 n. 42.

<sup>37</sup>TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

<sup>38</sup>RSV Revised Standard Version

<sup>39</sup>NEB New English Bible

<sup>40</sup>REB Revised English Bible

<sup>41</sup>NIV New International Bible

<sup>42</sup>GNB Good News Bible

were essentially the same as for the conveyance of property (*OC*<sup>43</sup> *D* s.v. “*patria potestas*”).<sup>2441</sup> The child under age in fact was no better off than a slave (a point Paul had been able to put to good effect in Gal. 4:1–7); note how closely parallel are the instructions of 3:20 and 3:22 (cf. the advice of Sir. 30:1 and 42:5). This situation is presumably reflected in 3:21, where the responsibility for the child is thought of as exclusively the father’s. For although the mother was the main influence over her children till they were seven (cf. pseudo-Phocylides 208), the father was primarily responsible thereafter for the boys at least. In view of all this it is worth noting that children who were presumably still minors (cf. Eph. 6:4) are directly addressed; evidently they are thought of as both present in the Christian meeting where the letter would be read out and as responsible agents despite their youth (Schweizer, *Colossians* 223; Gnllka, *Kolossierbrief* 220). Responsibility in Christian relationships is not to be determined by legal standing.

Obedience<sup>2452</sup> is called for in respect of both parents; those now primarily under their father’s discipline should continue to respect their mother also. This is not an exclusively Jewish feature, since honoring parents was widely recognized as a virtue (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.26.1–4; Plato, *Republic* 4.425b; Stobaeus, *Anthology* 3.1.80; 4.25.53 [in A. J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 91–93];<sup>2463</sup> Epictetus 2.10.7; 3.7.26; see further Lincoln, *Ephesians* 401; Wolter 201). But it was given particular prominence within Jewish tradition, as enshrined in the fifth commandment (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) and repeatedly emphasized in Jewish writings of the period (e.g., Sir. 3:1–16; 7:27–28; Tob. 4:3–4; *Aristeas* 228; *Jubilees* 7:20; Philo, *De posteritate Caini* 181; *De ebrietate* 17). A stubborn and disobedient son, indeed, was liable to death by stoning (Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18–21; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 2.232; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.206). Κατὰ πάντα (“in everything”) also reflects the customary respect in the ancient world for the wisdom of age. The assumption is that parents, acting as parents, will deal wisely and kindly with their children (cf. Matt. 7:9–11/Luke 11:11–13). This is the expected norm of good family and social relationships (so also Mark 7:10 par.; 10:19 pars.; cf. Rom. 1:30

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<sup>43</sup>*OCD* N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, ed., *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970)

<sup>4421</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus sums the position up thus: “The law-giver of the Romans gave virtually full power to the father over his son, ... whether he thought proper to imprison him, to scourge him, to put him in chains, and keep him at work in the fields, or to put him to death ...” (*Roman Antiquities* 2.26.4; similarly Dio Chrysostom 15.20).

<sup>4522</sup> “In the Pauline homologoumena it [ὕπακούειν] is used exclusively of obedience to Jesus Christ and to the gospel. Its use here in conjunction with the orders of creation is a sign of the relatively later phase of Christian thought” (Pokorný 181 n. 26).

<sup>4623</sup> *Ioanis Stobaei Anthologium*, ed. C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense: vol. 3 = Hense vol. 1, vol. 4 = Hense vol. 2.

and 2 Tim. 3:2). The counsel here, of course, does not envisage situations where the norm is breached by the parents or where a higher loyalty might need to be invoked (as in Luke 14:26).

The reason given is “for this is pleasing in the Lord.” Εὐάρεστος, “acceptable, pleasing,” will mean pleasing to God, as in the only two LXX uses of the word (Wis. 4:10; 9:10) and in the other Pauline uses (Rom. 12:1–2; 14:18; 2 Cor. 5:9; Phil. 4:18; only Tit. 2:9 otherwise; cf. Eph. 5:10—εὐάρεστον τῷ κυρίῳ). Here a more conventional value (Gnilka, *Kolossierbrief* 220 refers to Epictetus 1.12.8 and 2.23.29) has been Christianized even before the next phrase is added. “In the Lord,” as in 3:18, roots the justification thus claimed in the tradition which formed the basis of Christian identity and conduct (translations like “the Christian way” in NE<sup>47</sup>B/RE<sup>48</sup>B and “your Christian duty” in GN<sup>49</sup>B again obscure the point). Here the tradition is that indicated in the preceding paragraph (the parallel passage Eph. 6:1–2 goes on to quote Exod. 20:12/Deut. 5:16 LXX explicitly); the thought is close to that of Philo, *De mutatione nominum* 40: “If you honor parents ... you will be pleasing (εὐαρεστήσεις) before God.” In other words, we no doubt have here (despite Merk 216–17) a conscious taking over of the particularly Jewish emphasis on honoring of parents. That the Lord is Christ here simply confirms that the traditions of Christ as Lord (2:6–7) will have included such Jesus tradition as Mark 7:10 and 10:19.<sup>504</sup> In the face of the challenge from the Colossian Jews it was no doubt important for the Christians to be able both to affirm their heritage of Jewish parenesis and to affirm it as “well-pleasing (to God) in the Lord (Jesus Christ).” Here, in other words, we can recognize a double apologetic slant in the parenesis: assurance to influential outsiders that the Christian message was not subversive and to Colossian Jews that the new movement was still faithful to Jewish praxis and ideals.<sup>51</sup>

**3:21** οἱ πατέρες, μὴ ἐρεθίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἵνα μὴ ἄθυμῶσιν. Indicative of his central role in the household, the head of the household is now addressed a second time, this time in his role as father (see also 4:1).<sup>525</sup> Corresponding to his responsibility to love his wife, the father

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<sup>47</sup>NEB New English Bible

<sup>48</sup>REB Revised English Bible

<sup>49</sup>GNB Good News Bible

<sup>5024</sup> Schweizer, *Colossians* 215, asks whether the order (husbands and wives first) may reflect the influence of Mark 10:1–9 par., and Pokorný 182 wonders whether the tradition of Mark 10:13–16 par. may lie behind 3:21; see also Ernst, *Philipper, Philemon, Kolosser, Epheser* 233–34; but see also Gnilka, *Kolosserbrief* 210.

<sup>51</sup> James D. G. Dunn, [\*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 246–251.

<sup>5225</sup> Πατέρες could, however, mean “parents” (BAGD s.v. πατήρ 1a; cf. Heb. 11:23; so also JB/NJB, GNB; Schweizer, *Colossians* 223), but the narrower focus reflects the

has a responsibility not to “provoke” (ἐρεθίζω, usually in a bad sense [BAG<sup>53</sup>D], though the only other New Testament usage, 2 Cor. 9:2, is positive), that is, “irritate” (NJ<sup>54</sup>B/GN<sup>55</sup>B) or “embitter” (NI<sup>56</sup>V; “exasperate” in NE<sup>57</sup>B/RE<sup>58</sup>B; “drive to resentment” in J<sup>59</sup>B) his children (see also Lohmeyer 157 n. 2). Here again the emphasis is not uniquely Christian (see, e.g., Menander, in Stobaeus, *Anthologia* 4.26.11–19; Plutarch, *De liberis educandis* 12, 14, 16 [= *Moralia* 8F-9A, 10D-E, 12C]; pseudo-Phocylides 150, 207 in Schweizer, *Colossians* 224 n. 51). It is striking, however, that the stress once again is not on the father’s discipline or authority but on his duties (Schrage, *Ethics* 255) and that the only responsibility mentioned is this negative one, rather than that of bringing up and training the children (contrast Eph. 6:4 and *Didache* 4:9). If this is not merely coincidental, and reflects something of the situation in Colossae, it suggests that the primary concern was to avoid aggravation in the situation of stress addressed. That is to say, we may envisage a situation where younger members of the Christian families were in a vulnerable position. Either they felt attracted to the alternatives offered by the Colossian Jews (since their parents were converts to such a characteristically Jewish body, worshipers of the one God in the name of Messiah Jesus, and may previously have been proselytes or God-fearers, the worship of the synagogue would seem to be closely related), and a too strong fatherly reaction could have driven them away. Or they were embarrassed, as Gentiles and among their fellow Gentiles, at belonging to such an ethnic sect as Christian Judaism. It would take fatherly tact and not just a laying down of the law to hold the different generations of the Christian family together.

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*patria potestas* of the father (Gnilka, *Kolosserbrief* 220); cf., e.g., Mishnah *Kiddushin* 1:7.

<sup>53</sup>BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

<sup>54</sup>NJB New Jerusalem Bible

<sup>55</sup>GNB Good News Bible

<sup>56</sup>NIV New International Bible

<sup>57</sup>NEB New English Bible

<sup>58</sup>REB Revised English Bible

<sup>59</sup>JB Jerusalem Bible

This line of reflection is encouraged by the reason given: “in case they lose heart” (RE<sup>60</sup>B; so also NJ<sup>61</sup>B, NRS<sup>62</sup>V), that is, lose their θυμός, their strong feeling and courage (LS<sup>63</sup>J), become timid (references in Lohmeyer 157 n. 3), “go about their task in a listless, moody, sullen frame of mind” (Lightfoot 225). To belong to such a strange sect, a religion without a cult center, without priest and sacrifice, must have exposed the younger members of the Christian families of Colossae to some abuse from their fellows in the marketplace. Without strong parental encouragement they could easily become “discouraged” (RS<sup>64</sup>V). The psychological sensitivity displayed here is remarkably modern (see also Caird 209).<sup>65</sup>

3:18. **Wives** are to **submit to** their **husbands as** their heads. This command was not limited to Paul’s day, as is obvious from two reasons he gave elsewhere: (1) the order of Creation (man was created first, then woman; 1 Tim. 2:13); (2) the order within the Godhead (Christ submits to the Father; 1 Cor. 11:3). Submission or subordination does not mean inferiority; it simply means

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<sup>60</sup>REB Revised English Bible

<sup>61</sup>NJB New Jerusalem Bible

<sup>62</sup>NRSV New Revised Standard Version

<sup>63</sup>LSJ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. H. S. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940; with supplement, 1968)

<sup>64</sup>RSV Revised Standard Version

<sup>65</sup> James D. G. Dunn, [\*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 251–252.

that the husband, not the wife, is head of the home. If he may be thought of as the “president,” she is the “vice-president.”

Of course there are moral limits to this submission; it is only **as is fitting in the Lord**. Just as obedience to government is commanded (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13) but only insofar as government takes its place under God (Ex. 1; Dan. 3; 6), even so a wife’s submission to her husband is only “in the Lord.” That is, she is not obligated to follow her husband’s leadership if it conflicts with specific scriptural commands.

3:19. **Husbands** are responsible to **love** their **wives** (as Christ loved the church; Eph. 5:28–29). So they are to exercise loving leadership, not dictatorial dominion. Perhaps husbands need this reminder to be tender and loving as much or more than wives need the reminder not to usurp authority over their husbands. Assuming absolute authority will only embitter one’s wife, not endear her. The words **be harsh** translate *pikrainesthe*, which is more literally, “make bitter.” (A different word is used in Col. 3:21; see comments there.) Wives, like tender and sensitive flowers (cf. 1 Peter 3:7), may wilt under authoritarian dominance but blossom with tender loving care. So in a maturing marriage the husband exercises compassionate care and his wife responds in willing submission to this loving leadership.

3:20. **Children** are to **obey** their **parents in everything**. Disobedience to parents is designated in the Old Testament as rebellion against God and was severely punished (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). Jesus set an example for children by obeying Joseph and His mother Mary (Luke 2:51). Obedience to parents **pleases the Lord**. This does not suggest that obeying one’s parents merits salvation for a child. Rather, obedience reflects God’s design for order in the home. As Paul wrote elsewhere, “It is right” (*dikaion*, “just” or “proper”) for children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1).

3:21. **Fathers** (and mothers; cf. Prov. 1:8; 6:20) should not presume on this obedience and **embitter** (*erethizete*, “provoke or irritate”) their **children** by continual agitation and unreasonable demands. Paul wrote, “Fathers, do not exasperate (*parorgizete*) your children” (Eph. 6:4). This will only make them **become discouraged**. Praise for well-doing rather than constant criticism will, along with loving discipline (cf. Heb. 12:7), help rear children in “the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Norman L. Geisler, [“Colossians.”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 683.