

## RELATIONSHIPS – ALL IN THE FAMILY.

**Scripture:** Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-26 and 6:1

An old saying that holds a lot of truth goes: “You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family.”



God gave us our parents, perhaps brothers and sisters too – God gave us our children and God has no exchange policy – our family is ours for life. God created man to share a loving relationship with Him, but we read in Genesis 2:18 that God recognised that it was not good for man to be alone. He created a perfect helper – a woman, a companion, tailor made for him.

Adam recognised the special place the woman had for man – she was a special gift from God, made uniquely for him. And that is still true today.

One of the closest things to the heart of God is the family. God created the family to be in relationship with Him and in service of Him. God created the family to mentor future generations of followers - the place where each of us begin to learn about how relationships work or don't work is within the family.

If you want to have a strong and healthy family, the Lord must build your home. Family relationships will either be dynamic and maturing, or stagnant and dying.

The family life is not man centred but God centred. God and His Word must come first. Biblical ethics shows how the man and women in Christ must live in the presence of God and in the power of the Spirit.

Now some people struggle with various passages of Scripture – and that is okay if you willingly wish to learn more and explore the passage. But you will never learn if you run away from difficult passages.

In our readings Paul is calling on believers to honour Christ by honouring, loving and helping one another which is following Jesus' example and building on the principle of mutual submission which stems from being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul presents examples of how believers should be subject to one another in household relationships. So let's look at the context. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Greco-Roman world it was standard for every household member to be subject in daily affairs to a patriarch. This view was central to Greco-Roman society.

Paul works within this framework to suggest a model that makes Christ the ultimate patriarch – the ultimate authority whose viewpoint is based on mutual love.

Paul first calls on the subordinate – according to Greco-Roman values – to submit to authority and then reminds the superior to exercise authority considerately in ways that honour Christ.

Now you need to understand, Paul is not saying that a wife ought to respond to her husband with mindless obedience. Being subject to one's spouse should be voluntary and conscious.

Submission in marriage is not demeaning, it is informed by God's relationship to the church. In the context to love – the Greek word Agape is used which means to put the needs and interests of others before your own.

Submitting to another person is an often misunderstood concept. It does not mean becoming a doormat. Christ submitted His will to the Father and we honour Christ by following His example. When we submit to God, we become more willing to obey His command to submit to others, that is, to subordinate our rights to theirs.

For the wife, this means willingly following her husband's leadership in Christ. For the husband it means putting aside his own interests in order for care for his wife.

Submission is rarely as problem in the home where both partners have a strong relationship with Christ and where each is concerned for the happiness of the other. Mutual submission preserves order and harmony in the family while it increases love and respect among family members.

Paul includes slaves because they were considered members of the Greco-Roman household. Paul urges masters who are believers to use their authority with integrity because in God's kingdom they too are slaves and God is their master.

Unlike the slavery of the pre-Civil war era in North America, slavery in Greco-Roman world often functioned as a credit system – to pay off debts and many people chose this way. However, slaves were able to hold positions of authority, could own property and become free.

Paul never commends slavery and he shows how both slaves and masters are equal before Christ – this was a radical statement for his culture and time. It challenged a lot of people.

He said – through the Gospel slaves and masters are brothers and sisters in Christ – thus demanding that all parties exhibit God’s values of justice, mercy and love.

To help us all develop safe and healthy relationships Scripture provides us with 5 easy to remember ways.

These are: covenant, grace, empowering, intimacy and divine order.

**1. COVENANT – NOT CONTRACT:** To love and be loved.

### **WHAT IS A COVENANT?**

A Covenant is “an unconditional commitment which is demonstrated supremely by God in the role of parent.

The first two mentions of covenant in the Bible are found in Genesis 6:18 (with Noah) and Genesis 7:1-7 (with Abraham).

***“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”  
(Genesis 7:7).***

A strong and healthy family or other close relationship must be based on COVENANT, not a contract. A contract says, “If you do this, then I will do that.” and can be broken. A covenant is unconditional and unbreakable.

The logical beginning point of any family relationship is a covenant commitment, which has unconditional love at its core. Out of the security

provided by this covenant love develops and in an atmosphere of grace, family members have the freedom to empower each other.

Notice also that the covenant isn't just between the husband and the wife – but children, too!

## **2. GRACE – NOT LAW:** To forgive and be forgiven.

Family relationships as designed by God are meant to be lived out in an atmosphere of grace and not law.

***Ephesians 4:32: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”***

In a family relationship based on law, perfection will be demanded of each other. Rules and regulations will be rigidly set up to govern relationships. This pressure adds guilt to the failure that is inevitable in such a situation.

GRACE doesn't mean that you don't have to have rules in your family, but rather that you give your spouse and your children the freedom to fail and walk in forgiveness! What better place to learn – not having to hide who you are and learn to accept each other in spite of differences.

## **3. EMPOWERING – NOT POSSESSIVE POWER:** To serve and be served.

***Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”***

As parents, part of your job is empowering your children. “Empowering is the active, intentional process of enabling another person to acquire power.”

***Deuteronomy 6:6-7*** “***And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.***”

As parents, you are to teach your children about the Lord!

**4. INTIMACY – NOT DISTANCE:** To know and be known.

***Genesis 2:25*** “***And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.***”

God wants us to know and be known by one another in our families intimately.

What happens when you get two magnets close to each other – they are drawn together. Family relationships should naturally share loving touches. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters – should be drawn into safe and supportive hugs.

Adam and Eve stood completely open and transparent before God. It was only after their disobedience that they tried to hide from God out of a feeling of nakedness and shame... The intimacy which Adam and Eve felt was an ability to be themselves without any pretence. This will only happen in a family where covenant, grace and empowering are realities. It is through honest communication that we experience that intimacy.

## **5. DIVINE ORDER** Building your families according to God's plan:

We read that wives are to submit to and respect their husbands. Husbands are to unconditionally love their wives as Christ loved the church. Children are to obey and honour their parents.

Family relationships should be bound together with super glue – unbreakable. Parents should model a relationship that is constant and steadfast before their children. Faithfulness should be learnt at home.

Paul teaches us that the life of the believer – both men and women – should be marked by faithfulness. They keep their promises and are true to their word. A believer doesn't waiver in their commitment – their word should be dependable in all areas of life.

**Conclusion:** The central key to each of the above for, not only the family, but any relationships is that no-one should try to be number one. Selfishness should be replaced with humility, learning to put others first.

**Mark 9:35 Jesus called the 12 and said – if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all.**

God designed our relationships. He designed the family. God will help guide us in how we should be relating to our spouses, brothers, sisters, children, friends.