

Our salvation includes forgiveness as well as a new life in Christ in which we can and should pursue righteousness, even in regard to how we function in our social relationships. The three primary social relationships of NT times are found today as well, although we can apply principles of the master-slave relationship to that of employer and employee.

It is important to consider these relationships in pairs to remember that they affect one another but also not to push blame off one to the other. The Biblical instructions also appear to concern relationships in which both or only one may be a believer. The former is an advantage, but the latter is not an excuse.

**I. *The relationship of husbands and wives***

*Colossians 3:18-19; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7; cf. Titus 2:4-5*

**1. *The responsibility of wives to their own husbands:***

Wives are to submit to their husbands “as it is fitting in the Lord”. This is recognition of a God-ordained, functional structure and not a measure of superiority or inferiority. It is an acceptance of God’s plan and a recognition that it is good.

Note: submission/obedience in all three pairs is not required if it means clear disobedience to God. But the attitude must continue to be right, as with the wife who should have a gentle and quiet spirit.

**2. *The responsibility of husbands to their own wives***

The responsibility of the husband to his wife is to love her as Christ loved the church and as much as he cares for his own body.

Paul warns about being harsh (NIV, ESV) or (more likely) not to become embittered (NASB, NKJV). Bitterness can reveal itself in our tone of voice and produce a harshness. Bitterness is an issue of the heart which sprouts trouble (Hebrews 12:15). It can arise when we haven’t forgiven or are not loving as we should (cf. 1 Cor 13:4-8).

Although Peter does not use the word “love” in his commands to husbands, he commands what is needed to love (living according to knowledge) and what expresses love (treating her with respect as the weaker vessel and fellow heir of the gracious gift of life).

**II. *The relationship of parents and children***

*Colossians 3:20-21; Ephesians 6:1-4; cf. 1 Timothy 5:4; Deuteronomy 6:6-9*

**1. *The responsibility of children***

The primary responsibility of children who are at home and dependent upon their parents is to obey in everything. Their eventual marriage will clearly change their focus of responsibility. The obedience they learn at home will often affect how they view obedience to God.

The primary responsibility of all children, regardless of age, is to honor their parents. This affects how a child obeys as well as how adult children relate to their parents.

The reasons for compliance: (1) It pleases the Lord (Col 3:20). (2) It is right (Eph 6:1). (3) It is to the child’s own benefit since God promises that it will go well with such children.

**2. *The responsibility of parents***

- a. Ultimately responsibility rests in the hands of the fathers, since that is the specific term which Paul uses. Tasks can be delegated but responsibility rests upon the father.
- b. In child-raising the primary responsibility is to bring up the children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4), the sense of which is explained in part in Deuteronomy 6. It is important that the Word of God affects our lives, how we train and what we communicate.
- c. Paul’s cautionary warning in Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4 is not to embitter or exasperate your children. Embitterment or exasperation could be caused through favoritism, inappropriate demands, arbitrarily changing rules, unjustified blame, inappropriate responses, etc.

**III. *The relationship of masters and slaves or employers and employees: five principles***

*Colossians 3:22–4:1; Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Peter 2:18-25; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:1-2*

1. *Full obedience:* excluding sinful action, an employee should do what the employer says.
2. *Sincere motivation:* a good worker does not work just to be seen, but to do a good job which is pleasing to the Lord.
3. *A Christ-focused perspective:* we serve the Lord, who bought us and who will ultimately evaluate and judge our work.
4. *Divine justice:* God will repay for all wrong done by slave or master, employer or employee. God does not favor one over the other, or excuse one or the other because of imagined extenuating circumstances.
5. *Spiritual equality:* in Christ there is neither slave nor free (Col 3:17). Both have the same Master and are rewarded by Him. We should treat one another knowing that we both equally give account to God.

God is concerned about our work-place, but wants us first to seek His righteousness and His Kingdom.

In all relationships our love for God is primary, followed closely by our love for others. We pursue God’s righteousness and His kingdom and think of others more highly than ourselves. “... whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Col 3:17 NIV)