

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 236**

**Colossians 3:18-25**

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**Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)**

**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

### **Episode Summary**

Paul continues his teaching on how gratitude toward Jesus, the author of salvation who is supreme over all other powers, ought to influence the believer's conduct. In this Colossians 3:18-25, Paul focuses on commands about household management. The "household" relationships in view are husbands and wives, fathers and children, and household servants/slaves. All of Paul's household principles are framed by Colossians 3:17 – "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, episode 236, Colossians 3:18-25. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing this week?

**MH:** Pretty good. Can't complain.

**TS:** Well, Mike, I wanted to briefly call for questions, specifically about the book of Colossians, as we normally do when we finish up a book. We're getting close. Only one chapter left. So if you have any questions about the book of Colossians, please email me at [TreyStricklin@gmail.com](mailto:TreyStricklin@gmail.com). You can get the correct spelling on the NakedBiblePodcast.com website. Send me your questions, and then we'll do a Q&A specifically about Colossians here in a few weeks.

**MH:** Yep, it's getting to be that time. Like you said, after today we'll only have one more chapter.

**TS:** Yeah, and we'll do a regular Q&A after that, and then that will give us enough time to collect those questions.

**MH:** Sure, sounds good.

**TS:** Alright. Well, I guess we're into chapter 3 this week.

**MH:** Yeah, it's verses 18 through 25 of Colossians 3, and that does finish up the chapter. Now, I'm just going to read the section, and you can probably guess where we're going to be spending most of our time on this one. Let's just jump right in to... I'm going to include verse 17 here, because it sets the context for 18-25. Paul finished the last section this way. He says:

**<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

And then he goes into this section:

**<sup>18</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. <sup>19</sup> Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. <sup>20</sup> Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. <sup>22</sup> Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.**

That's the end of Colossians chapter 3. Now, it's probably fair to say, we're going to be spending the lion's share of our time on the wives and husbands section. But I do have things to say about each of these sections that I think are fairly important. What we want to do is we want to focus on the commands in this section, noting their ancient and their Christological context. What I mean by that is, there are some cultural considerations (that's the ancient part) and then regardless of what the cultural considerations are, what is said in here needs to be framed again in light of verse 17:

**<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

So it has a Jesus-orientation that works within the culture, but he's going to transcend the culture, as well.

So a few general observations as we jump in about this whole section. Theologically, and in terms of discipleship, the context is pretty obvious. It's set

by the prior verse (verse 17), about doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. So the idea of honoring Jesus frames what follows (or at least ought to). And second, scholars typically refer to this section's command with a German term: *Haustafel*. "Household rules" is the translation of that—commands about household management. It's a convenient category term that has woven its way into academia. And it's useful because in the culture (he's writing to the Colossians here in Greco-Roman culture) there are such codes. The kind of thing Paul does in verses 18-25 is known in literature elsewhere of the same period and earlier. So Dunn has a useful summary of this whole issue of genre (the "household rules" idea), and I want to selectively read some portions from his commentary. He says:

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There are similar household codes in other early Christian writings (Eph. 5:22–6:9; 1 Pet. 2:18–3:7; with less close parallels in 1 Tim. 2:8–15; 6:1–2; Tit. 2:1–10; *Didache* 4:9–11; *Barnabas* 19:5–7; 1 *Clement* 21:6–9; Ignatius, *Polycarp* 4:1–5:2; Polycarp, *Philippians* 4:2–3). This suggests that the Colossian code may have been derived from earlier traditional material, whether in form or content or both, and raises afresh the question whether this was simply a dollop of standard teaching inserted here (like an old sermon being “rerun”) or whether it had any particular relation to the situation in Colossae...

Now, I'll grant his quotation there assumes the lateness of Colossians, which I don't think is warranted, but the idea is that this isn't new. This isn't unique to Colossians. Dunn continues:

The model, insofar as there is one, was that of οἰκονομία, “household management”. In the classic definition of Aristotle, the household was the basic unit of the state. As part of good ordering, therefore, it was necessary to deal with its basic relationships: “master and slave, husband and wife, father and children” (*Politica* I.1253b.1–14; Balch, *Wives* 33–34). That these became common concerns in thoughtful society is sufficiently clear from such examples as Dio Chrysostom's fragmentary oration on the theme (οἰκονομία), covering the same three relationships (LCL 5.348–51; Balch, *Wives* 28–29), Seneca's description of one department of philosophy as concerned to “advise how a husband should conduct himself toward his wife, or how a father should bring up his children, or how a master should rule his slaves” (*Epistle* 94.1; Balch, *Wives* 51)...

So you have these ancient examples, and Dunn continues. He has a few others.

...and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who praises Roman household relationships using the same three pairs (in the same order as Colossians) and deals with duties of wives before those of husbands and those of children before those of fathers, as here (*Roman Antiquities* 2.25.4–26.4; Balch, *Wives* 55). That similar concerns

were active in diaspora Judaism is evident, for example, from pseudo-Phocylides 175–227, Philo, *De decalogo* 165–67; *De specialibus legibus* 2.224–41, and the disputed extract *Hypothetica* 7.14 (preserved in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8.7.14); and Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.199–208 (see particularly Crouch 74–90)...

**You can find this material both in Greco-Roman and Jewish texts, is his point.**

The framework, then, is provided by the traditional concern for “household management...”

Why should such a code be introduced here? . . . At all events, we can well understand that socially responsible Christian leaders, like their Hellenistic Jewish and Stoic counterparts, would wish to consider not merely how individuals should conduct themselves, but how Christian commitment to “the Lord” should affect the primary unit of community, the household. To become a member of the new family of Jesus (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:16–17, 29) did not involve displacement or justify neglect of household responsibilities, whether the believer belonged to a Christian or non-Christian household; Christian discipleship was not disruptive of society’s basic structure. Relationships within the family and household were themselves part of Christian vocation and the first place where responsibility to the Lord should come to expression and be put to the test...

This would be important not least since the earliest churches were all “house churches” (cf. Col 4:15), so that the model of the well-run household provided precedent for the well-run church (as we soon see in the Pastorals). With such motivation it would be natural to draw on rules of proven worth from the best contemporary social models. We should not ignore the fact that use of the model of “household management” betokens a similar concern for society and its good order. But it also had the bonus of demonstrating the good citizenship of the young churches, facilitating communication with the rest of society, and making possible an apologetic and evangelistic impact which should not be discounted.

**I think that’s a good contextual setting. It was important for Christians to conduct themselves and their families in such a way that they wouldn’t be aberrations to the wider culture. There’s going to be *some* aspects of family life and interpersonal relationships that are going to... There’s going to be differences there. And we can imagine what some of those more obvious ones would be, maybe in terms of sexual immorality, or worship of ancestors, or something like that. But what Dunn is talking about here is the basic unit of family and basic relationships. Paul is going to tell the church at Colossae and other audiences that, “Your household needs to be orderly. Your relationships need to be above reproach, in terms of what you can do that won’t dishonor God, so that people**

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outside the Christian community will be able to look at it and admire and appreciate.”

So we’ll start in Colossians 3:18 with some of the particulars here. And it opens:

**18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.**

And the last part of that is, of course, going to be important. A lot of the discussion here is oriented around the submission idea. Dunn writes this:

It is important to note that it is wives and not women generally who are in view. 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, 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.

That’s from Dunn’s commentary on Colossians and Philemon.

Now, let’s take a look at the terminology here. On the verb translated “submit” in Colossians 3:18 (it’s *hypotassō* in Greek), Moo observes this. I’m just pulling out things I think are interesting in the way commentators have looked at this. And Mo writes:

The verb is not common in pre-New Testament Greek but does occur thirty times in the LXX, where it occasionally refers to humans “submitting” to God (2 Macc. 9:12) but more often refers to submission in the secular sphere, particularly to the military and the state. The verb occurs thirty-eight times in the New Testament, twenty-three of them in Paul. It can denote a forcible “subjecting,” as when evil spiritual beings are “subjected” to the authority of God or Christ (Luke 10:17, 20; 1 Pet. 3:22) or when God “subjects” all things to Christ (1 Cor. 15:27; cf. Heb. 2:5, 8 [both quoting Ps. 8:7]; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 3:21) or when God, because of humanity’s fall into sin, puts creation in “subjection” (Rom. 8:20)...

But particularly characteristic of New Testament usage are exhortations to voluntarily “put oneself under” the authority or direction of someone or something else: all believers to God (Heb. 12:9; Jas. 4:7) or to his law (Rom. 8:7); the church to Christ (Eph. 5:24); Jews to God’s righteousness (Rom 10:3); humans to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13); Christians to their leaders (1 Cor. 16:16); slaves to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18); young men to

older men (1 Pet. 5:5); children to their parents (Luke 2:51); wives to their husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5).

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You get a number of instances (this is Moo's point) where you have a term that is used in a lot of forcible contexts, both in terms of the state and even theologically, with the spirits being subjected to the authority of Christ, which obviously wouldn't be voluntary. But what Moo is saying is, a lot of these references in the New Testament are exhortations to voluntarily putting yourself under authority. And of course, the last part of Colossians 3:18 says that this is fitting in the Lord. So this is the way this needs to be framed and what we need to be keeping in mind. Back in the previous episode of the podcast, it's this whole thing about thinking of yourself in a new way. And part of being who you are in Christ is the way that you relate to each other in a variety of relationships. And in *this* section, as Dunn pointed out (and it's obvious), what Paul's zeroing in on here is the primary social unit—the concern for household order. It's wider than husbands and wives and parents and children. It includes household servants, as well. This is the basic unit of society. It's the idea of having an orderly household, not like showing the guys at work that you're the boss and everybody cowers in your presence. That isn't the idea. The idea is orderliness. And in the Christian context, the context of Christ's lordship, it's voluntary. It's not something that is to be forced upon others without regard to their personal welfare or something like that. It's a voluntary thing, and it's done for the purpose of honoring the Lord. Not in terms of showing off or harming someone else or something like that. Some self-serving motive is not in view. Now, back to Dunn here for another comment. He says:

The call for wives to be subject (*hypotassō*, "subject oneself, be subordinate to") is unequivocal, not even lightened by the prefixed call "Be subject to one another," or the addition "as the church is subject to Christ" (as in Eph. 5:21, 24). 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 [MH: We're quick to worry about the one (weakening the language) but we ought to be just as worried about exaggerating it, as well—amping it up.]; "subjection" means "subordination," not "subjugation."

Now, let me repeat that line, because I think Dunn says that well.

Its significance should not be exaggerated. "Subjection" means "subordination," not "subjugation."

Those are different, but related terms. But they are different terms. The nuance there is important. Markus Barth comments on the passage this way. He has some useful things to say.

*Hypotassō* in the Greek means “to order accordingly, to join below, to subordinate, to subjugate.”

He uses the term “subjugate.” I would agree with Dunn—that’s not the best vocab choice.

In the middle voice...

That’s what we have in Col 3:18. We have a grammatical middle voice. I don’t want to go into a grammar spasm here, but the middle voice is basically an action that’s done or committed with respect to the one doing the action. It’s an action done with benefit for (or if it’s a bad verb, a deleterious effect to) the one doing it. The action springs back on the subject (the one doing the action).

In the middle voice, it means “to subject oneself, to subjugate oneself,” as well as “to be subservient” [MH: to another, an outside, external actor being in view there]. In the Letter to Aristaeas 257, an intertestamental Jewish work from the second/first century B.C.E., the word is used in a positive sense for a humble, humanly accommodating, and therefore God-pleasing demeanor.

If you’re thinking that this term *must* mean... I would be even more blunt. If you’re thinking that it *does* mean, necessarily... like it inherently means something violent—something aggressive, something over-lordly, something heavy-handed—you would be incorrect. That is not an inherent semantic in this verb. It can certainly be used that way, but the point being made here by Barth is that it’s also used of something that’s orderly and respectful and accommodating (that’s the way he puts it). There are contexts for that, as well. So context is everything. And what’s the context here? This is Colossians—Colossians 3:18. The prior verse says, “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” It’s not, “Hey, now you’ve got an opportunity to be abusive. You’ve got an opportunity to belittle someone.” That’s not in view.

In the NT, the verb occurs thirty-eight times; twenty-three of those are in the Pauline corpus. M. Barth differentiates two varying usages in the Pauline letters (AB 34A, pp. 709f.):

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1. When *hypotassō* is used in the active or as a *passivum divinum*, thus as a description of the name of God, “the act of subjugation and the fate of submission reveal the existence of a hierarchy, or establish the proper order of right and might.”

What he means by that is when you have *hypotasso* in a sentence and it’s an active verb, then the subject (the one who’s doing the action) really describes subjugating something. In a number of contexts, you’re going to have the



exertion of state authority or spiritual authority (like a god with the powers of darkness). So there are times when Barth is saying, “When it’s active or when God is the actor” (that’s what divine passive means—God is the external force), “it often has this rougher or more heavy-handed feel because of God’s own authority in that particular situation.”

2. Through the use of “middle or passive indicatives, participles or imperatives of this verb, however, Paul describes a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.” This kind of subjection is demanded only of Christ, or of persons who are “in Christ.”

Those are some of his observations on how the New Testament uses this. And in Colossians 3:18, this is what we have. We have a grammatical middle. So Paul is telling the believers at Colossae, “You voluntarily do this. And why do you voluntarily do this? Because it’s easy? Because you like it? No, this is a way to honor the Lord.” And at the end of the section (and in particular, the reference is to when he’s talking to slaves or servants) he says, “Just know that you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done. And there is no partiality when it comes to God, who is observing all this. If you’re in an abusive situation...” And in the case of the slaves, unless they escape, they can’t get out of this. They have no legal standing. God sees that and he will repay. And in the end, you will receive your inheritance as a reward as a believer. It’s really the best that Paul can offer them. When we get into the slavery section, I want to say a little bit more about that. You get the question, “Why doesn’t Paul just demand that Christians rise up and revolt and declare slavery the awful thing that it is?” Well, because the Romans would probably just kill everyone. So you have to think of the context. The person who is the most vulnerable (and sometimes the only person who’s vulnerable) is the slave in that situation. But I don’t want to get too far ahead of myself. We’ll stick to the wives thing here in verse 18. Barth’s point, Dunn’s point, Moo’s point, is about... it’s a voluntary aspect here. It’s about order and accommodation. It’s about humility. It’s not about belittling someone, demeaning someone—this aggressive, heavy-handed feel.

Outside of the Pauline writings, these observations are not applicable, however, as Luke 10:17 and 20 demonstrate, where in the Greek an indicative form of the middle voice is also used.

And I think that’s important because we are in Paul’s writings. So what Paul has in view is this kind of flavor to the term. You ask, “Well, that’s all well and good, but how should we take this? What does it mean? How should we think about this?” I think Moo has a handy section here. I’ve picked out a few things that he says, and then I’m going to offer something that (if you’re really interested in this topic)... You’ll be able to get something on the episode page for this particular



section in Colossians if you really want to drill down into something particular. We'll get to that in a moment. Moo writes here that:

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*The Message* translates Colossians 3:18 “understand and support your husbands.” But as the data above reveal, this illegitimately weakens the meaning of the verb. To be sure, as the husband loves his wife, he will often, in effect, “put himself under” her, deferring to her interests and needs (Phil. 2:3–4). But this “submission” of the husband to the wife is of a different character than the submission required of the wife to the husband. In this latter sense, the wife “puts herself under” her husband in recognizing and living out an “order” established by God himself within the marriage relationship (and by extension, in the family of God, the church).

Because you're going to have some of these principles that are going to apply elsewhere. But I think we're wise (with Dunn's earlier comments and a few of the others)... That's what's in view here: husbands and wives, Christ and the Church. Yes, we have an analogy going on there, but on the human level we've got Paul talking to wives, not just women everywhere. Because you have women who can function quite well independently. They don't have husbands. They're independent households, and that's just fine. And that becomes really important, not only in the early Church (like with house churches), but even in the New Testament. You have women who are conducting these house churches in their own homes. They have the means to do it. When you come into their home, it's their home. They're the ones in charge. So there's overlap between the individual home and the church. That's inevitable because you're meeting in somebody's home—just like it would be today. You meet in somebody's home, it's their home. We're not carrying over a husband/wife relationship as though it means that all the men in the church get to treat all the women in the church—get to demand submission or something like that. That is *not* in view. Unfortunately, we get that in some of our own culture (some things we've all heard about, that we've experienced, or that we've just heard in the broader culture). But that is not in view in what's being discussed here. Back to Moo:

As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 11:3, “the head of a wife is her husband” (ESV)—the husband, as the “prominent” and “directing” member of the relationship, is to take the lead in the marriage relationship.

This submission of the wife can, of course, take the form of “obedience.” But three caveats at this point must be introduced in order to strike the right balance in Paul's teaching. First, it is probably significant that the household code here in Colossians urges wives to “submit” to their husbands but children and slaves to “obey” their fathers and masters, respectively (3:20, 22).

Let me stop there. Did you catch that? Paul does not use the word “obey” for the wife in relationship to the husband. He uses that vocabulary for the children and for the servants. He does *not* use it of the wife. Instead, the wife is to voluntarily put herself under the authority of her husband, in the orderly household relationship that Paul’s zeroing in on here in the culture. And Moo says it’s probably significant. And I would think it is, because you could very easily have the same verb for all three groups, but he doesn’t.

This pattern is typical, though not universal, in the New Testament, and suggests that the New Testament writers put the relationship of wife to husband in a different (and less “authoritarian”) category than these others. “Obedience” naturally fits a situation in which orders are being issued and in which the party obeying has little choice in the matter. Submission, on the other hand, suggests a voluntary willingness to recognize and put oneself under the leadership of another. To “submit” is to recognize a relationship of order established by God. But submission to any human is always conditioned by the ultimate submission that each believer owes to God.

We have an ultimate authority. This statement in Colossians 3:18 isn’t all Christian men to all Christian women. It’s not that. It’s also not about heavy-handed authority. Paul doesn’t even use the word “obey” here. He uses the word “submit.” And ultimately, the one voluntarily putting himself or herself under the authority of someone else... Ultimately, the person that they’re submitting to isn’t the final authority. The final authority is God. So this is not a legitimization of an unbelieving husband telling a wife to do a certain thing that is contrary to the faith. It’s not a legitimization of that at all. Because her ultimate authority is *not* her husband at that point; it’s God. There *is* an order, and we can’t pluck one part of the order out and harp on it and forget about the rest of what’s going on theologically.

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In any hierarchy we can imagine, God stands at the “top of the chart.” This means, then, that a wife will sometimes have to disobey a husband (even a Christian one) if that husband commands her to do something contrary to God’s will. Even as she disobeys, however, she can continue to “submit,” in a sense, by recognizing that her husband remains her head—just not her ultimate head.

Second, the submission of the wife to the husband is inevitably and necessarily conditioned significantly by the demand that husbands love their wives, and, in so loving them, will often “submit” to their needs, desires, and wishes (Eph. 5:21). The mutuality implied by the one-flesh union of husband and wife and the husband’s love of the wife must be given full weight, even as the need for wives to recognize the headship of their husbands is upheld.

Third, we might cautiously suggest that, without eviscerating the word of its meaning, “submission” may take different forms in different cultures. [MH: I think that’s certainly true.] Paul’s was a patriarchal culture, in which a man, husband of a wife, father of children, master of slaves, “ruled” the household. The New Testament certainly does not abolish a certain kind of “patriarchy”—although it must be said that the etymological sense of “rule” in the word is not the best way to express the New Testament concept of the headship of the husband.

Nevertheless, we may tentatively suggest that the New Testament teaching about the “oneness” of all in Christ, coupled with the demand that husbands love their wives (as Christ did the church; Eph. 5:23–24), sets a trajectory that leads to a more equal sharing of all dimensions of the marriage relationship.

I think that’s well put. If you have a situation where the guy is just proof-texting this verse and other verses as a means to get what he wants or as a means to show off—as a means to prop himself up in the eyes of other men—he’s just operating with a completely wrong motivation. How is that loving your wife? Honestly, how is insisting on your wife... you proof-text this verse to her... If it makes her feel demeaned and belittled, how in the world...? Prove it. Let me hear it. How is that loving your wife? At best, you’re really ignorant of your wife [laughs] at that point. If you don’t have a clue that this is demeaning her or belittling her in some way, now you’ve got the added problem of cluelessness. And you’re actually violating the command. You’re taking the command and severing it from what follows. (“Husbands, love your wives.”) Both of these things are in the same passage, and both of them are framed by “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Sometimes (speaking as a man here)—a lot of times—the way to love your wife is to not get your way. You may not like that, but that’s the reality of it. And if you do that, you can actually honor both of these. Because your wife is going to (if she has a clue) see that, and that is going to encourage her to voluntarily accommodate and work with you. You can’t just take one side of the coin and pretend the other doesn’t exist. They both have to work in tandem, and that’s what makes the whole passage interesting—that they’re both there, and there has to be this symbiotic relationship. Just another observation from Barth. He’s quoting a scholar named Kähler, a German.

E. Kähler also emphasizes that, in the NT, the element of voluntariness is associated with [*hypotassō*]. She differentiates this verb sharply from “to obey,” [MH: we’ve already seen that Paul doesn’t use the word “obey” here, he uses *hypotasso*] because where the concern is obedience, it is already decided for the subordinate ones why their obedience is necessary. This is not a concern with *hypotassō*. Wherever it occurs, any kind of compulsion is excluded.

The key word there is “compulsion.” Because you’ve got voluntariness in the context. So voluntariness and compulsion don’t really work together. Which is why, as he quotes Kähler’s work, it suggests that if you actually look this up,

wherever *hypotasso* occurs, any kind of compulsion is excluded when you have a middle or passive voice that doesn't involve God.

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The concern is with the order of God, who desires observance and response, and when this answer is expressed by [*hypotassō*], it is an entirely voluntary decision. She observes for this passage, "Their subjection (that of the wives, H.B.) is valid for the order of God, not really that of the husband as the final goal. Thus their subjection can never be blind obedience which she would have to render to her husband or which he could even demand" (p. 180).

In other words, the wife has to keep God in mind, as well. That's the motivation. It's not just blind obedience. "Whatever the husband says, I have to do, because of this verse." No, there's an ultimate (higher) authority here. Barth adds:

These observations of E. Käbler can be verified basically in Col. The ethical admonitions proceed from the "glorious abundance" of the now-revealed secret, so that the action to which they are summoned can be understood as the joyful affirmation of that which is given, and the idea of compulsion and involuntariness is misplaced here. In addition, especially for Col, we are ultimately dealing with subjection to the Messiah (cf. esp. 3:11). Additionally, v 18 does not contextually deal with "blind obedience" since it is preconditioned that women, insofar as they are married to non-Christian husbands, can refuse this obedience in an essential point, namely in that they do not venerate the gods of their husbands.

That's his example. His example is, "You're a Christian wife. You're married to a non-Christian husband. This doesn't force you to venerate the pagan gods that your husband worships." So that's an immediate, pretty obvious example of how this command is ultimately about obeying Jesus, being conformed, putting yourself under submission to him. I think that's just helpful to frame things that are going on. Dunn adds:

The one distinctively Christian feature is the additional words "as is fitting in the Lord" ... [the Greek word *anēkō*, translated "as is fitting"] reflects the typical Stoic idea that one's best policy, indeed one's duty, was to live in harmony with the natural order of things, 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)—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).

Now, what do we do with that? I think, just to summarize what's going for 3:18, the submission command is not about obedience being owed or required to the husband in all cases. It's not about blind obedience. Paul uses the obedience terminology for other relationships in the same context he does *not* use it of the wives. Secondly, rather, the idea is voluntary subordination to a divine order—an order which has God as the highest authority, not the husband.

Now, when Moo (in the passage I read) references 1 Corinthians 11:3 here, which says, “the head of a wife is her husband” (that's the way the ESV puts it, anyway)... If you're interested in the meaning of the word “head” in that passage and just more broadly, and this whole idea of order, I've plucked out from Thiselton's commentary (a commentary that I've not referenced yet)... It has a long—not an appendix, but a subsection of his commentary on the meaning of the Greek term for “head” (κεφαλή). This is a long... This has been a decades-long... Centuries, I guess... But in the West, the debate over the meaning of κεφαλή has been raging for a couple of decades now. And Thiselton has a really nice summary of the back-and-forth (the scholarship) about what headship actually means. And so I've plucked that out of the commentary and made a pdf of it, and we're going to put that on this episode's page. So if you want to read that (it's 18 pages or something like that), it's a really nice summary for those of you who really want to drill down the point. I'm going to move beyond it now. The basic debate is, does head mean “source” or does it mean “authority?” So you can drill down on that and get some more information there:

[Thiselton, \*kephalē\* and Its Multiple Meanings](#)

But I want to move on to verse 19:

**<sup>19</sup> Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.**

40:00

Dunn notes that we have the verb “ἀγαπάω” here. If you have an Interlinear, you're going to detect that. He (and I would agree) thinks there's some significance to that. He writes.

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). Thus ἀγαπάω plays the role in 3:19 of “in the Lord”...

Or “as is fitting to the Lord” in the previous verse and later on in verse 20. To do something because it's fitting in the Lord is the same thing as sacrificially loving them. So in verse 18, wives are to submit themselves to their husbands, because that's what the Lord wants. And really, he actually did that by example (putting himself under not only God's authority, becoming a man)—the whole mind of Christ thing—doing that voluntarily. So the flip side of that, “Husbands, love your wives,” using ἀγαπάω, is the way... What they do there—that verb choice—takes

us back to the love that Jesus exercised in a number of contexts. It's the "mind of Christ" thing.

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.

So it doesn't alter the role. He says, "That's true, but we have to let *ἀγαπάω* condition how we see this whole thing working—the symbiotic relationship between submission and love. And Barth says it needs to condition the role and prevent abuse of the power in the culture.

Now he uses a term in his commentary here that... I don't know if I'm going to cite something that uses it later or not. But if you're studying this passage, and you're into serious commentaries, you're going to find in the Greco-Roman culture (part of the Roman culture) something called the *paterfamilias*. The man of the house had absolute life and death authority in the home—literally life and death authority. And what Dunn and Barth and some of these other writers... when they comment on how we need to view these commands, not only in the context of household rules and household order, but in the wider context that... You have to realize how much power that the man of a Roman household (the husband) had over the wife, over his children, over his servants. It was literally life and death authority.

And so what the commentators are saying here is that Paul doesn't go *there*. Paul is all in favor of order, but he blunts that kind of thing by telling husbands, "You need to love your wives and don't be harsh with them." That's the flipside of the whole submission thing. And *hypotasso* being voluntary and it's not the word for obedience, and you get to verse 19, and he flips around and says, "Look, we're not repeating the *paterfamilias* style here, where whatever the husband says is law and he has absolute life and death authority." No, "Husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them." Why? Because that honors the Lord. How do we know that he cares about honoring the Lord? He uses *ἀγαπάω* as the verb, and *ἀγαπάω* is going to take their minds back to the context where that verb is used—especially in the gospels, especially of Jesus. Why? Because verse 17 says that you're supposed to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. We talked last time about letting the word of Christ (Christ's teachings) dwell in you richly. You're supposed to be imitating him in your social and family relationships. And the *paterfamilias* model just doesn't do that. It's far too harsh, far too sweeping and all-encompassing—a person's literal life and death fate in the hands of the man of the house. That's not what Paul is endorsing here. Paul is endorsing order within the household, as Jesus would do it. On all sides, as Jesus would do it. That's just the guiding principle. So in other words, humility and kindness (not the lust to be obeyed and served) should dictate how a



husband treats his wife. This is not a proof-text endorsement for getting what you want. That is not the mind of Christ. That is not the framework in which what Paul is writing works. It just doesn't work that way. Now, Moo also comments on *ἀγαπάω*. He says this:

As is fitting for such a list of “rules” for the household, Paul turns quickly and somewhat abruptly from wives to husbands. Requiring wives to submit to husbands, as we have noted, matches widespread Greek and Jewish teaching about marriage. [MH: It's a very secure cultural perspective there.] Requiring husbands to love their wives does not.

[Laughs] In other words, that's something the culture *wouldn't* have expected. So, yeah, the submission verse in verse 18—you've got plenty of Greco-Roman and Jewish teachings about that. But when Paul throws in “Oh, husbands love your wives, and don't treat them harshly,” that would have turned heads. That wasn't common.

The concern in the secular codes was usually effective household management—especially since the household was typically viewed as a key building block of society and of the state. Accordingly, the focus of the codes was on the *paterfamilias*—the “head of the household”—and what he should do to maintain order and decorum in his household. Referring to a husband's love for his wife would not fit this purpose—and, indeed, no other code we have discovered from the ancient world requires husbands to love their wives.

Now, that's kind of startling. And there are a lot of these household codes from the Greco-Roman world. I'll read it to you again:

No other code we have discovered from the ancient world requires husbands to love their wives.

This is an altogether different ethic. Moo adds:

Moreover, the word for “love” here is *agapaō*, the distinctly (though certainly not uniquely) Christian word for the kind of sacrificial, self-giving love whose model is Christ himself (the connection brought out in the Ephesians parallel, 5:25). Perhaps significantly, the only other occurrence of the verb “love” in Colossians refers to God's love for us, his people (3:12).

These are really good nuggets from the text that really help us frame what is being discussed here and what isn't in view. Now I would say, as a final point of advice for verse 19 and application... I think you can summarize this well in a statement like this: If you want your marriage to fail, micromanage and nitpick your spouse in a heavy-handed way. That's a good recipe for failure. If you want it to succeed, examine yourself and love your wife. Think about, “What do I need



to do as a husband to love my wife so that she won't be sitting there thinking about accommodating me with fear and trembling," because that isn't the point. If you want your marriage to fail, micromanage and nitpick and be heavy-handed with your spouse. If you want it to succeed, do that to yourself. Examine yourself. It's probably going to work and help you to honor both sides of the relationship—both sides of the coin.

Let's move to verses 20 and 21.

**<sup>20</sup> Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.**

**<sup>21</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.**

The problem for us here is the cultural disconnect with the Greco-Roman world. We not only have that with the *paterfamilias*, but we have it in other ways. Barth, for instance, says:

The Greek term *teknon* means "offspring, child," without having a specific age in mind. The word alone does not give sufficient reason to think of a minor child. It is possible and probable that "grown children" are addressed, who lived in one household with their parents as was customary in the extended family in antiquity, where the father remained head of the household until his death.

There is a cultural disconnect there. We don't really have that kind of situation now. Even if you have older kids still living at home, we don't have a culture that says the father remains the head of the household until his death, and basically it's this *paterfamilias* (life and death) kind of power. We don't really have that. But there's a reason why Barth... What he's essentially saying is there's a reason why *teknon* is used, and *teknon* doesn't really have a specific age in mind. Because culturally, you'd have older children, even adult children, living under the same roof. That was just sort of normal. It also doesn't really reflect the Jewish understanding of patriarchal, nomadic life. When you had the patriarchal age, this is before you had cities and urbanization—before they're in the land. To proof-text these sorts of things from Genesis ignores the fact that the family life changed. When the Israelites got into the land, they built houses and cities. It wasn't that you all lived under the same tent and when you got married you just sewed on another section. Everybody's in the father's tent, and he's the patriarch—he's the head of the household until he dies. It doesn't stay that way. It's not a static thing. Because you also have verses like Genesis 2:24:

**<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**

50:00

There is a sense that you have your *own* unit. So we don't want to be ignorant culturally. We don't want to press one culture into a passage to justify the way we want to interpret a passage. Moo adds:

Paul emphasizes the absolute and sweeping character of this relationship by adding that children must obey their parents *in everything*. [MH: He's going to unpack "why that wording?"] This universal and apparently unqualified requirement of obedience naturally raises questions about its implementation in our culture. We do not (especially in the west) have households of the sort that Paul had in view in this passage. This does not mean, of course, that his exhortation can simply be dismissed. But it does mean that wisdom, rooted in broad biblical principles, will be required to apply the requirement of "obedience in all things" to children in our culture. As long as children are living under the protection of their parents, we would suggest, they are expected to obey their parents. (Although even here, of course, exceptions, in the case, for instance, of abusive parents, must be recognized.) But when children are no longer under the protection and care of their parents, we would suggest that, while deference and "honor" are still appropriate, obedience is no longer necessarily to be expected... In the Ephesians parallel, Paul requires children to obey their parents because it is "right" (*dikaion*) and then quotes the fifth commandment of the Decalogue as justification (6:1–2). As he does throughout the admonitions to husbands and wives, children and parents, here in Colossians Paul abbreviates, claiming simply that children should obey their parents, for this pleases the Lord. The "Lord" is again the Lord Jesus Christ (see v. 17).

Dunn adds:

The legal status of children under Roman law was still more disadvantaged [MH: comparing it to women]. Technically speaking, they were the property of the father; so, for example, the formalities for adoption were essentially the same as for the conveyance of property (*OCD* s.v. "*patria potestas*") [MH: an ancient text he's citing]. 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).

Colossians 3:20 says, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." And 3:22 says, "Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters." You have the "everything" language in both.

This situation is presumably reflected in 3:21 [MH: sandwiched in between is "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."], 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.

This is Greco-Roman culture. Barth adds this:

For a comprehension of the declaration in Col 3:20, the situation in the society of the time needs to be considered as well. By the fact that “children” in a household became Christians in opposition to their parents, they put the Roman *patria potestas* [MH: this idea of children as property], the position of the father in the household in antiquity, in a questionable position from a non-Christian viewpoint, which could leave them subject to the reproach that they were undermining the Roman societal order (cf. Comment II).

What Barth is saying is that in a Christian context, the relationship of fathers to children isn't going to be as categorical and as clear-cut and as overlordish when we have Christians involved, even if it's a Christian child to a non-Christian father, and vice versa. It's going to change the dynamic a little bit. Barth says, that could put this part of household order... That could create problems. People on the outside could look at something going on in a home where you have a mix (Christian and non-Christian) and think that the Christians are undermining the Roman social order. Back to Barth:

55:00

On this basis, we can understand the emphasis “in all things.” It is expressed because just this decision of “children” against the religion of their parents and in the Jewish Messiah is excepted from obedience. [MH: in other words, as an exception.] Obedience to parents is emphasized as a characteristic concern in the faith of the Messiah against all accumulated accusations, as these are formulated not only by Tacitus (Hist V, 5; cf. Comment II), but as they are also transmitted in the NT (cf. Acts 16:20f.).

Let me translate that a little bit. What Barth is saying is, you're going to have these situations where because the children might be Christians (and you have adult children here), they're going to view Jesus as the higher authority—higher than the father, the *paterfamilias*. And so the advice is because you might run into this exception, you really, really need to obey your fathers in everything else. You need to have a good track record here. Because (maybe, maybe not) it might help in the situation where, when you *have* to [dis]obey to honor the Lord, it's not just going to be one of many instances where... “Oh, he's doing that because he's a Christian. He just disobeys his father all the time. They're just social disrupters. They're just trouble. They're against the social order of things.” No, “you have a pristine record,” is what Barth's saying that was in Paul's mind. Paul's concern is, “You need to have a pristine record, because when push comes to shove, if you're ever in this situation and you have to disobey, Lord willing, maybe that'll be taken into consideration and you won't have a terrible ending,” or something like that. So this is Barth's point, saying this is probably

why Paul uses this terminology. “You need to have a really, really good track record of obedience to your parents because of this context—the eventuality here. It really could happen.” And of course, it did.

Colossians 3:22-25... let’s just finish up the passage:

**<sup>22</sup> Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.**

As the commentators are very quick to point out, slaves are just part of the household order. They were members of the household. Very common. Barth says:

The house slaves are the ones addressed here, not the slaves on large estates, in mines, or on galleys.

The whole Ben Hur thing. These are rules for household orders. So there’s a subset of what we might call the whole issue of slavery in antiquity. There’s a subset in view here.

For the author of Colossians, this kind of slavery was not a major problem. He proceeds naturally from the point that in the relationship of slave-master/master-slave what it means to have put on the “new self” (cf. esp. 3:11) can be made manifest. The fact that there, where this new self is put on, is neither slave nor free person, does not mean for Paul the abolition of slavery, but it is a summons for him to shape the contact with each other in such a way that it will be revealed that the Messiah takes slaves, as well as masters, into his service in order to proclaim that he, the Messiah, is *the master* over all things.

So when you have a proper, orderly relationship, and not just a heavy-handed orderly relationship, but in a household, you have masters who are believers, and slaves who are believers, they need to let their status as equal in the sight of God—equal members of the family of Jesus... That needs to frame how they relate to one another. And for a believing master, that needs to frame and influence how he treats his slave or his servant. And vice versa, as well. Of course, the wording here in verses 24 and 25, Paul knows that you’re going to have a situation where you have believing slaves and unbelieving masters. And the unbelieving master could be abusive. He reminds the slave, “Look, you’re going to receive the inheritance as your reward. You’re actually serving the Lord Christ and the wrongdoer will be paid back.” He’s trying to encourage slaves in that situation. Dunn says:

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[The] slaves are clearly members of the Christian congregation and treated as responsible individuals (Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 127; Schweizer, *Colossians* 213). It was evidently another characteristic feature of the early Christian churches that they contained as members of one body both masters and slaves, presumably in some instances at least a *paterfamilias* and (some of) his slaves from the same household (e.g., Philemon; see further pp. 300f. below). This, too, was not entirely distinctive in the ancient world, but the “no slave or freedman” of 3:11 made the equal membership of master and slave a principle of far-reaching significance.

**Again, people are watching in the wider culture, what Christians are doing within their homes, within their households. Dunn adds:**

The instructions which follow are directed primarily to slaves’ responsibility toward their masters (four verses), with only one verse directed to the masters (4:1).

**Which says, “Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven,” which is quite a good turn of a phrase on Paul’s part. There’s only one verse to that effect, and then you get all these other verses at the end of chapter 3 directed toward the slave.**

That probably indicates that there were more slaves than masters in the typical Pauline church (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26), strengthening the impression that Christianity initially drew its greatest numerical strength from the less advantaged groups in society (cf. Celsus’s dismissive comment in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.44: “only slaves, women, and little children”)...

It is also a reminder that “the rules of the game” were (as always) dictated by the powerful. Christians who wanted as much freedom as possible within these structures to pursue a Christian calling as members of the church were wise to carry out their responsibilities as slaves with all diligence. This should not be criticized today as merely social conformism; those who live in modern social democracies, in which interest groups can hope to exert political pressure by intensive lobbying, should remember that in the cities of Paul’s day the great bulk of Christians would have had no possibility whatsoever of exerting any political pressure for any particular policy or reform. In such circumstances a pragmatic quietism was the most effective means of gaining room enough to develop the quality of personal relationships which would establish and build up the microcosms (churches) of transformed communities.

**Why doesn’t Paul advocate slave rebellion in any of his epistles? Didn’t he know it was wrong? Well, yeah, he knows about the image of God. He knows about the**

fact of, “In Christ, there is neither bond nor free.” Paul knows this. He wrote the stuff! (Except for the image of God.) But Paul talks about imaging a lot, using the Old Testament language to talk about being conformed to the image of Christ. And in Colossians 3:17, this is why he’s given the commands, because you’re supposed to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. You’re supposed to let the word of Christ (the teaching, the example of Christ) dwell in you richly, and that’s going to frame your conduct.

Paul knows all this. So why doesn’t he advocate rebellion or protesting *en masse*—going down to the Roman senate, a bunch of Christians there with posters? Why doesn’t he advocate stuff like this—rebellion or protesting level of advocacy? The short answer is, he didn’t want the slaves to be killed or taken away from their masters and sent to worse masters. They are the most vulnerable in the entire situation. They don’t have rights. This is not a democracy. A lot of people living under Roman authority don’t even have Roman citizenship. You can’t transfer the assumptions you would make about our own culture back into the New Testament. If you have a bunch of Christians rising up against this institution, acting like PETA would, going into places and freeing the slaves, you’re going to have a whole lot of people dead or moved to worse situations. Or you’re going to have people who weren’t slaves becoming slaves, because the Romans are just not going to tolerate it. They have no incentive or reason to tolerate it. This is a tyranny, okay? [laughs] It doesn’t work this way. Maybe think of North Korea, or something like that, where you just can’t handle the situation in the way that we, in the West, would love to see it handled. The possibility literally does not exist.

1:05:00

So when Paul writes about slavery, he can suggest to Philemon that he’s a brother in the Lord now and he can suggest to let him go. Now, let’s say Philemon does that. Yes, it sets Onesimus free, but it also puts Onesimus in a position of vulnerability. You say, “How, Mike? How does that work?” I would recommend to you... This is fresh in my mind, because I just got done reading the autobiography of Frederick Douglas, which is a great book. But Douglas actually talks about even the status of blacks who had their freedom in the pre-Civil War, during the Civil War, and even the post-Civil War context. Not so much post-Civil War—then the issue was Jim Crow. But before and during, even in northern states—places where he escaped—he was still vulnerable because if someone knew he wasn’t owned by someone else he was like “fresh meat.” They could capture him and he can’t protest. No one is going to protest on his behalf that, “No, you can’t have this guy, because he’s my property. Here’s the proof.” If there is no legal relationship binding (in this case) Frederick Douglas to a master that, “Okay, he’s a good master, but I’m still a slave, and I don’t like it”... Douglas had bad situations and he had good situations, in terms of the violence and the subjugation. But if he wasn’t *attached* to someone and somebody else just wanted to literally pick him off the street, they could do it.



In a Roman context, if there was no legal attachment between Philemon and Onesimus and somebody picked Onesimus off the street, Philemon is going to lose that case in court if it ever gets there. And Onesimus is in big trouble. So we can't know if Philemon ever released him or not. All I'm saying is that these situations are not as simple as you might think. And I think, ultimately, this is why Paul doesn't demand his release. I think he leaves it to the wisdom of Philemon as to what to do. "What would be the best thing to do for this person in his situation and in your context? I'm going to leave that to you, but I want you to know that this is a good guy. He's a believer. I love him. He's very, very useful to me. I wish I could keep him here, but I'm going to send him back." All that stuff. There are other things going on, and maybe this is the best way for Paul to say, "Do the wisest thing here. What is the way to make him least vulnerable in the context of the culture and in the context immediately of where you're living? What is the thing that makes him the least vulnerable or that gives him the most legal protection? Or is this literally the best situation?" We don't know all of the ins and outs of this.

On a wider culture scale, Paul is not going to advocate for overturning slavery. He's not going to run in there and set people free, because you're going to have a lot of people... Yes, they might have it bad, but they're going to die. They're going to be tortured. They're going to lose limbs. They're going to die. They could have their family separated and sold into other slavery situations. The Romans did all of this stuff. And the people who were the most vulnerable have no legal recourse. They just don't.

And so we have to realize that Paul understands his own context better than we do, so we shouldn't be going around judging Paul. He doesn't endorse slavery by not saying, "Hey, we need to go out there and free everybody, or they should all be let go." He doesn't endorse it. There are other considerations going on that we can guess at with reasonable accuracy, like this is a very realistic possibility. "So maybe the best thing is to leave things as they are and treat each other like brothers and sisters. Maybe that's the best thing to do here, because I don't want to make you more vulnerable. I could fight for you if I had to, given this context." All these things are realistic possibilities. We don't know them because they're not spelled out in the New Testament in all these cases. But they are, nevertheless, real concerns. So let's not be blaming Paul or anybody else in the New Testament context for endorsing something like slavery. That isn't what they're doing. They're being cautious. They're taking the culture into consideration. And they're reminding both sides (both servants and masters) that, ultimately, you have a higher master. Colossians 4:1:

**Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.**

1:10:00

God is watching. The Lord is watching.

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**Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)**

That is what is supposed to frame all of this. And not just the master/servant relationships, but all these relationships, as we've talked about. So scripture doesn't... There is no such thing as a sanctified culture. A lot of scripture is given to us presuming the culture of the writer (and, of course, the original readers). It is what it is. And we need to let the Bible be what it is without accusing the authors of endorsements and approval and whatnot. They're not laying out a case... Paul's not laying out a case for the goodness of slavery as an institution. It's just part of his world and he's trying to give the best advice he can give—advice that honors the Lord. And that also creates a good name for the believing community, because he knows that there are going to be occasions when Christians are going to disobey their masters. They're going to disobey the *paterfamilias*. There's going to be friction. So as much as is possible, obey your masters. Obey your fathers in everything. Build up the good will, if that's at all possible. Because he knows what all of the possibilities are, both within the unit and externally, with the power of the state.

So let's not treat the passage simplistically. Let's not filter it through our own system of government—our own culture. It is what it is. Let's try to think a little bit more carefully about what Paul is really concerned with. He's concerned about *people*. He's concerned about the believers in all these situations, no matter what side of the situation they're on. And he's giving the best advice he can possibly give in the context of their status as equal believers in the family of God.

**TS:** You know, Mike, in college, I got a job as a dishwasher. And I was the best dishwasher there is, and I worked my way up. And today, look, I'm on the Naked Bible Podcast from washing dishes. [MH laughs] So, you know, maybe, just whatever situation you're in, you do it to the best of your ability. And some people try to relate it to the employer/employee analogy, but I don't know if that really fits. That slave issue is such a hard...

**MH:** It is. There would be some overlap, and some obvious disconnect, too. And even employment in another country is going to be different than employment here, just because of laws and whatnot. But I hear you. I had (and I'm not making up this number—I actually counted) 35 jobs from the time I left high school to the one I have now. It was a long haul.

**TS:** Yeah, I mean... Briefly, during your schoolwork, you had night jobs and going to school. I don't even know how you slept to achieve your Ph.D.

**MH:** There were a few... The last year of my doctoral (and this is partly my fault, but we needed the money) there were two days of the week that I didn't sleep at

1:15:00

all. Now, that was poor planning, I guess you could say. For a few months, anyway, I was in that situation. But you do what you have to do. But I always had two or three (or in some cases, four) little part-time jobs. I'd cobble them together. My wife occasionally worked. Sometimes I couldn't provide everything. We didn't have this sanctified rule about "the wife can't work," or anything silly like that, but we tried to keep her at home. Most of the time, it worked. Some of the time, it didn't. But you do what you have to do. I was just in a situation where if I was going to get through school and if I was going to be married and have kids [laughs], it's on me. It is on me. And I have to put up or shut up. And you just do what you have to do. My motto was, "You can do anything for a short time if you know it's not going to be forever." But that's just what you do. I did a lot of security work, which was great, because you get to do your homework. The problem, of course, is sleeping, because you miss that. And a lot of custodial work. Once I was done with what I needed to do, the rest of the time was mine. You try to be strategic when you're in situations like that. But yeah, there were some pretty low-level jobs there. And I don't want to minimize them because they were important. There were a couple of times when I was the lowly security guard that saved the company a few million dollars. That happens. They're important jobs, but they don't have status in our culture is what it really amounts to. It's all about status. But you do what you have to do, and we need all of that.

**TS:** Absolutely. We all have to start somewhere. That's why, young people, you've got to pay your dues. And stay with it and take pride in your work.

**MH:** Yep. And if you do that, your boss will notice. Just trust me.

**TS:** Absolutely.

**MH:** Because there aren't a whole lot of people who just approach whatever the job is with that kind of attitude. It *will* get noticed. Someone will notice it. Because it's not the norm.

**TS:** Absolutely. Well, at least God will notice everything, so we're in good hands. Alright, I want to remind everybody to send me your Colossians questions at [TreyStricklin@gmail.com](mailto:TreyStricklin@gmail.com) if you have any. I will be collecting those. Next week, we'll be getting into chapter 4. With that, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.