

*Christ over  
All: Paul's  
Letter to the  
Colossians*

“The Christ-  
Centered  
Home,”  
Part 2

Colossians  
3:18–4:1



## COLOSSIANS 3:18–4:1

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. Slaves in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”

- Paul focuses on three pairs of relationships that comprised the Greco-Roman household, describing the responsibilities of each party:
  - 1) Wives and Husbands (3:18–19)
  - 2) Children and Fathers (3:20–21)
  - 3) Slaves and Masters (3:22–4:1)
- In each case, Paul first instructs those in subordination, and then those in authority.
- Paul deviates from the common household codes of his day by emphasizing the *reciprocal nature* of these relationships and *the lordship of Jesus Christ* as the controlling factor.

# I. Wives and Husbands in Christ (3:18–19)

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## A. The Duties of Wives (v. 18)

“Wives, **be subject** to your husbands, **as is fitting in the Lord.**”

- “**Be subject**” – continuous action; “be subjecting yourselves” – the reflexive voice of the verb implies a voluntary willingness (not merely compulsion) to place oneself under the husband’s authority.
- “**As is fitting in the Lord**” – the justification for the command: it is not *harmful or demeaning* but *appropriate*; it is consistent with God’s design and essential for human flourishing; it is to be done *in acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus Christ*.

## B. The Duties of Husbands (v. 19)

“Husbands, **love** your wives and **do not be embittered against them.**”

- “**Love**” – continuous action; “make it your practice to love”; describes “sacrificial, self-giving love whose model is Christ himself”; intended to point—albeit imperfectly—to what Christ has done for the Church (see Ephesians 5:25–33).
- “**Do not be embittered against them**” – Paul explains the positive command *to love* by prohibiting its antithesis; forbids the practice of allowing *bitter feelings* to become established in response to a wife’s actions—feelings that would then lead to harsh treatment.

## II. Children and Fathers in Christ (3:20–21)

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### A. The Duties of Children (v. 20)

**“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things,  
for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”**

- **“Children”** – Paul now turns to the second-most important category of household relationships and again begins with the party that is in subordination.
  - Paul addresses these children as those capable of faith, of understanding of biblical ethics, and of striving to please the Lord.
- **“Be obedient”** – continuous action; stricter than “be subject” (v. 18); “to follow instructions, obey, follow”; used also in Ephesians 6:1–3.

**“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things,  
for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”**

- **“In all things”** – emphasizes the *exhaustive scope* of such obedience; it cannot be limited by the child’s preference or the parents’ performance; it also cannot be limited to one parent and not the another—“**parents.**”
- **“For”** – introduces the reason for such an exhaustive command.
- **“This is well-pleasing”** – *literally*, “this is well-pleasing [to God]”; the result of such obedience is that it *pleases* God.
- **“To the Lord”** – *literally*, “in the Lord” (see the end of v. 18 for the same phrase)—the *spiritual sphere* in which this obedience is to be practiced: in the sphere of *Jesus Christ*, the One who is Lord over all; the only sphere in which *pleasing God* is possible.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord,  
for this is right.

HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

(which is the first commandment with a promise),

SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU,

AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.”

**I. THE COMMAND**

**II. THE MOTIVATION**

**A. Its Rightness**

**B. Its Reward**

**—Ephesians 6:1–3**

**(citing Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16)**

## What Is NOT Entailed in a Child's Obedience

- Belief that a parent's claim to authority is absolute (Col 2:10 – Christ “is the head over all rule and authority”).
- Agreement to participate in sin, whether with the parents or at their command (Acts 5:29 – “We must obey God rather than men”).
- Prioritizing the honor of one's parents above the honor of Christ (Luke 14:26 – “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother . . . he cannot be My disciple”).
- Refusal to “leave and cleave” in marriage (Genesis 2:24 – “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife . . .”).
- Life-long dependency and refusal to be responsible (the context of Colossians 3:20 and Ephesians 6:1–3 suggests children “under the roof”).

**A child's obedience entails a myriad of daily, practical things that require humility and surrender, faith that God knows what is best for him or her, and trust that the rewards are worth it all.**



“Let us all think, who still have parents spared to us, how much we owe to them, and let it be our joy, if we cannot recompense them, at any rate to give them so much of comfort by our conduct as shall show our gratitude. Let them have such joy in us that they may never regret the anxieties of past years, but may have their hearts made to rejoice that they brought into the world such sons and daughters. If we have had parents who did care for us, and anxiously said, “Are they safe?” let us be grateful to God, and let us never show that we undervalue his mercy by treating the boon [blessing] with contempt.”

—Charles Spurgeon, “An Anxious Enquiry  
for a Beloved Son”

## II. Children and Fathers in Christ (3:20–21) – cont’d

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### B. The Duties of Fathers (v. 21)

**“Fathers** do not exasperate your children,  
so that they will not lose heart.”

- **Ephesians 6:4** – “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
- **“Fathers”** – once again, in contrast to the typical household codes of the day, Paul turns to the responsibility of the one *in* authority, emphasizing *reciprocation*.
- Paul assumes the fathers to be the rightful heads of their households (*paterfamilias*) and so address them about their paternal duties.

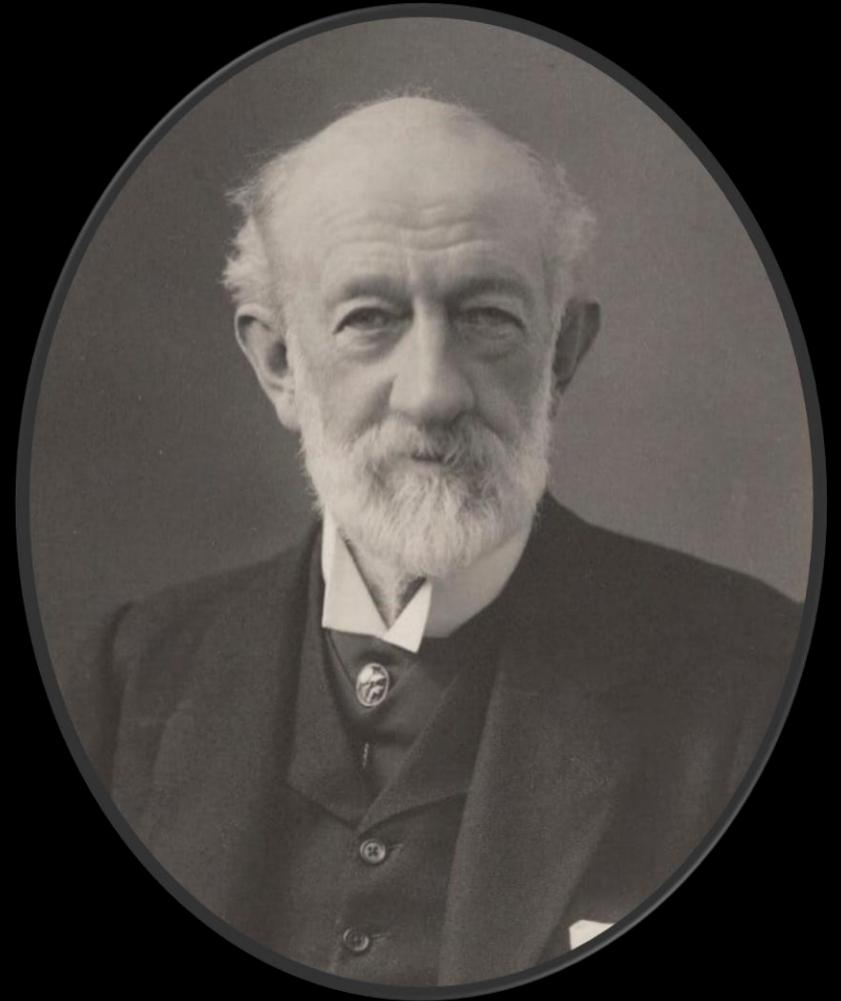
**“Fathers, do not exasperate your children,  
so that they will not lose heart.”**

- **“Do not . . .”** – rather than lead with a positive command, Paul only states a *prohibition*; implies that Paul saw the biggest need among the fathers was *to avoid* something.
- **“Exasperate”** – “to cause someone to react in a certain way”; in negative contexts, “to irritate, embitter.”
- **“So that”** – introduces the purpose for the prohibition.
- **“They will not lose heart”** – “to become disheartened to the extent of losing motivation”; so that they won’t think obedience is useless (no consistent outcome, no positive acknowledgment, etc.).

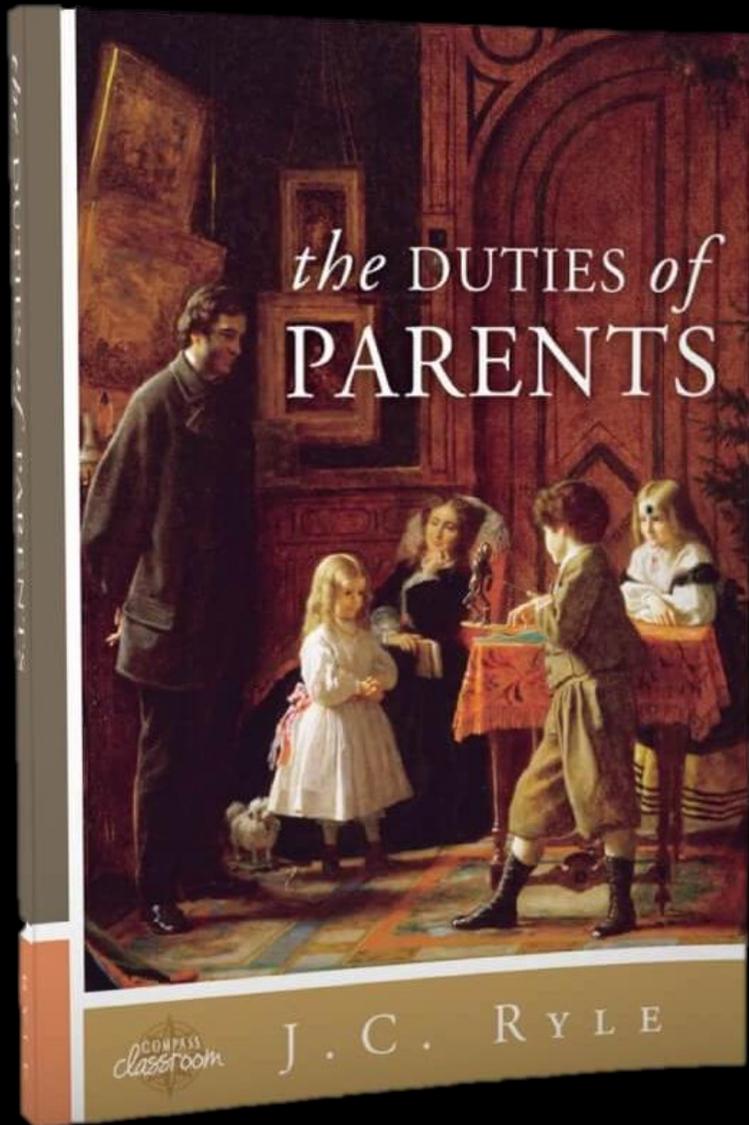


“For the child his only precept is ‘Obey your parents’; let parents see to it that they deserve obedience: and more than this, that they make obedience easy.”

—Robert Anderson

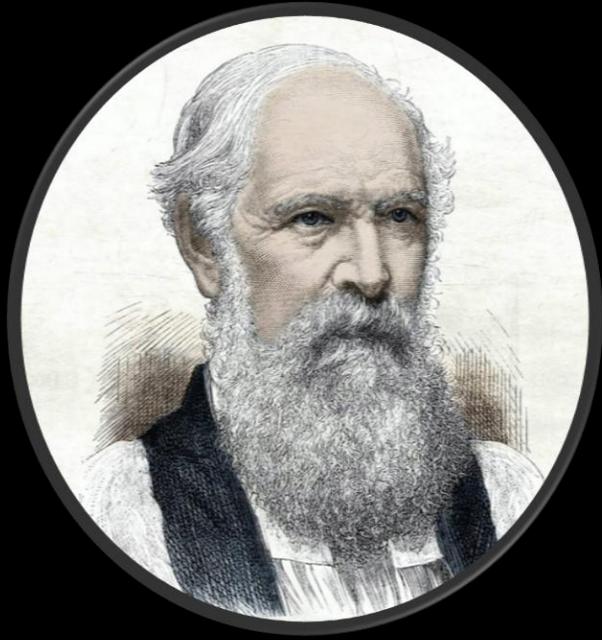


**A father's restraint from exasperating his children entails a myriad of daily, practical things to “put off” sinful practices (see esp. Col 3:8) and to “put on” Christ-like virtue (see esp. 3:12–13).**



**RECOMMENDED RESOURCE:**

*Duties of Parents*  
by J. C. Ryle (1816 – 1900)



“As a minister, I cannot help remarking that there is hardly any subject about which people seem so tenacious as they are about their children. I have sometimes been totally astonished at the slowness of sensible Christian parents to admit that their own children are in fault or deserve blame. There are not a few people to whom I would far rather speak about their own sins—than tell them their children had done anything wrong.

“Come now, and let me place before you a few hints about right training. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit bless them, and make them words in season to you all. Reject them not because they are blunt and simple; despise them not because they contain nothing new. Be very sure, if you would train children for heaven, they are hints that ought not to be lightly set aside.”

- 1. If you would train your children rightly, train them in the way they should go—and not in the way that they desire.**

“Remember—children are born with a decided bias towards evil—and therefore if you let them choose for themselves, they are certain to choose wrong.”

- 2. Train up your child with all tenderness, affection, and patience.**

“Kindness, gentleness, long-suffering, forbearance, patience, sympathy, a willingness to enter into childish troubles, a readiness to take part in childish joys—these are the cords by which a child may be led most easily—these are the clues you must follow if you would find the way to his heart.”

**3. Train your children with an abiding persuasion on your mind that much depends upon you.**

“Beware of that miserable delusion into which some have fallen—that parents can do nothing for their children, that you must leave them alone, wait for grace, and sit still.”

**4. Train with this thought continually before your eyes—that the soul of your child is the first thing to be considered.**

“This is the thought that should be uppermost on your mind in all you do for your children. In every step you take about them, in every plan, and scheme, and arrangement that concerns them, do not leave out that mighty question, ‘How will this affect their souls?’”

## **5. Train your child to a knowledge of the Bible.**

“You cannot make your children love the Bible, I allow. None but the Holy Spirit can give us a heart to delight in the Word. But you can make your children acquainted with the Bible; and be sure they cannot be acquainted with that blessed book too soon, or too well.”

## **6. Train them to a habit of prayer.**

“Parents, if you love your children, do all that lies in your power to train them up to a habit of prayer. Show them how to begin. Tell them what to say. Encourage them to persevere.”

## **7. Train them to habits of diligence, and regularity about public means of grace.**

“Tell them of the duty and privilege of going to the house of God, and joining in the prayers of the congregation. Tell them wherever the Lord's people are gathered together, there the Lord Jesus is present in a special manner . . . . Tell them of the importance of hearing the Word preached, and that it is God's ordinance for converting, sanctifying, and building up the souls of men.”

## **8. Train them to a habit of faith.**

“I mean by this, you should train them up to believe what you say. You should try to make them feel confidence in your judgment, and respect your opinions, as better than their own.”

## **9. Train them to a habit of obedience.**

“No habit, I suspect, has such an influence over our lives as this. Parents, determine to make your children obey you—though it may cost you much trouble—and cost them many tears! Let there be no questioning, and reasoning, and disputing, and delaying, and answering back. When you give them a command, let them see plainly that you will have it done.”

## **10. Train them to a habit of always speaking the truth.**

“I press this subject on your attention, not merely for the sake of your children's character in the world—though I might dwell much on this—I urge it rather for your own comfort and assistance in all your dealings with them. You will find it a mighty help indeed, to be able always to trust their word.”

## **11. Train them to a habit of always redeeming the time.**

“Idleness is the devil's best friend! It is the surest way to give him an opportunity of doing us harm. An idle mind is like an open door, and if Satan does not enter in himself by it, it is certain he will throw in something to raise bad thoughts in our souls. No created being was ever meant to be idle.”

## **12. Train them with a constant fear of over-indulgence.**

“It is natural to be tender and affectionate towards your own flesh and blood, and it is the excess of this very tenderness and affection which you have to fear. Take heed that it does not make you blind to your children's faults—and deaf to all advice about them. . . . Learn to say ‘No’ to your children.”

### **13. Train them remembering continually how God trains His children.**

“God the Father is ever training the members of this family . . . . He acts as a husbandman pruning his vines, that they may bear more fruit. . . . He knows all these things, and is ever ordering all for our good. He allots to each of us, in His providence, the very things we need, in order to bear the most fruit—as much of sunshine as we can stand, and as much of rain—as much of bitter things as we can bear, and as much of sweet.”

### **14. Train them remembering continually the influence of your own example.**

“Instruction, and advice, and commands will profit little, unless they are backed up by the pattern of your own life.”

## **15. Train them, remembering continually the power of sin.**

“I name this shortly, in order to guard you against unscriptural expectations. . . . You must not be discouraged and cast down by what you see. You must not think it a strange and unusual thing—that their little hearts are so full of sin. . . . Remember the natural depravity of your children, and take care.”

## **16. Train them remembering continually the promises of Scripture.**

“‘Train up your child in the way he should go—and when he is old he shall not depart from it’ (Proverbs 22:6). . . . Many children, I doubt not, shall rise up in the day of judgment, and bless their parents for good training, who never gave any signs of having profited by it during their parents’ lives. Go forward then in faith.”

## **17. Train them, lastly, with continual prayer for a blessing on all you do.**

“Without the blessing of the Lord, your best endeavors will do no good. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and except He touch the hearts of your children by His Spirit, you will weary yourself to no purpose. Water, therefore, the seed you sow on their minds, with unceasing prayer. The Lord is far more willing to hear than we to pray; far more ready to give blessings than we to ask them—but He loves to be entreated for them. And I set this matter of prayer before you, as the top-stone and seal of all you do.”