



Colossians 3:18-4:1 contains a list of instructions that are commonly referred to as “household codes.” These codes are not only common place in the New Testament, they were also common place in the Graeco Roman world. As we read these codes we need to pay close attention to what Paul is doing.

I. PAUL ACCOMMODATES HIS CULTURE

- A. Paul is accommodating culture by embracing cultural norms. He adopts the household codes of his day and fills them with gospel content.
- B. Paul is also accommodating cultural norms by challenging the institution of slavery from the inside out.
 - 1. The Bible in no way endorses the institution of slavery. It accommodates and humanizes it in both the Old and New Testament.
 - 2. The Bible in both creation and the gospel, plants the seeds that will ultimately lead to the dissolution of slavery altogether.
 - 3. So rather than mounting a frontal attack against the institution of slavery, Paul preaches the gospel to those who are caught up in the institution and transforms it from the inside out.

II. PAUL CHALLENGES HIS CULTURE

- A. While Paul is adopting the social norms of his day he is expanding on them in a very significant way.

1. Standard household codes only outlined the duties and responsibilities of wives, children and slaves. Paul highlights the responsibilities of husbands, fathers and masters.
 2. Standard household codes were written to maintain social order; Paul rewrites the codes in order to demonstrate the beauty and power of the gospel.
- B. There are significant differences between a standard household code and a gospel centered household code.
1. While Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands, he tells husbands to love their wives and not be harsh with them. If a husband loves his wife, submission will be mutual rather than unilateral. In a gospel-centered marriage you have two people who love each other deeply and sacrificially. They are each more committed to the welfare of the other than they are their own, and are each seeking to create an atmosphere in the home where their spouse will thrive and reach their full potential in Christ.
 2. While Paul tells children to obey their parents, he singles out fathers and tells them not to embitter their children. In other words, fathers have to be engaged, and know each one of their children intimately. They cannot be aloof from family life and dispassionately issue directives without knowing how each child will respond.
 3. Paul brings dignity to slavery by reminding slaves that they do not belong to another person, they belong to God. The indignity of serving another human being is overshadowed by the dignity of serving God in a difficult situation. While there is very little compensation for servitude, God will reward them richly, and he will punish both masters and slaves that have done wrong. Paul reminds the masters that they too are slaves serving a higher master, to which they are accountable for how they treat their slaves. In the book of Philemon, Paul encourages Philemon to receive Onesimus, a runaway slave, back into his home as a true brother in Christ rather than merely a slave. You can feel the institution of slavery unraveling as you work your way through the New Testament.

III. PAUL CHALLENGES OUR CULTURE

- A. There are many of us who look at household codes like this one and view them as quaint and out of date. We need to be very careful that we do not allow our own cultural snobbery keep us from hearing the ancient wisdom of Scripture. We need to let the Bible judge our culture rather than simply judging the Bible through the lens of culture.
- B. While the New Testament lays the groundwork for the dissolution of the institution of slavery, it only strengthens the importance of marriage and family. Slavery is neither grounded in creation nor enshrined in the law. The marriage covenant as well as male and female distinctives are grounded in God's creative purposes and strongly affirmed throughout Scripture.
- C. There are two approaches to male and female distinctives in the evangelical world today.
 1. The "egalitarian" position affirms the equality of men and women and holds that there is no distinction in the roles of men and women in the church or the home.
 2. The "complementarian" position affirms the equality of men and women but maintains distinct and complementary roles in the church and home.

- D. At Fellowship we hold to the “complementarian” position. We are part of a larger movement called “The Gospel Coalition” and affirm their confession of faith as our own. Their statement on humanity, is a beautiful clarification of the complementation position.

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God’s agents to care for, manage, and govern creation living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God’s wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments. (Article 4, Gospel Coalition Confession of Faith <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/confessional-statement>)

- E. So what is Paul doing here? He is both upholding male and female distinctives as established in creation and affirmed throughout Scripture and transforming them through the power of the gospel.
1. While there are clear distinctions between the roles of men and women in the church and the home, the gospel so transforms them that they offer a level of dignity and honor to both men and women that far exceeds any contemporary view of equality.
 2. The Trinity is our model. There are clear distinctions in roles between the Father, Son and the Spirit with certain members of the Trinity acting in subordination to the others, but there is also such a high level of honor and mutuality, with each seeking to glorify the other, that there are times when the distinctions all but disappear.

IV. OUR RESPONSE

Our response should always be to demonstrate that the gospel is better—in our marriages, in our home, and in our fellowship.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR GROUP

1. Instead of mounting a frontal attack on the institution of slavery, Paul chooses to preach the gospel to those who are caught up in the institution and change the institution from the inside out.
 - a. How can we apply an inside out approach to challenging some of the pressing issues of our day (abortion, gay marriage, transgender accommodation)?
 - b. What are some ways our frontal attacks can do more harm than good and often end up undermining rather than promoting the gospel?
2. What happens when we emphasize a distinction in roles between men and women, but fail to demonstrate the mutuality and honor that the gospel affords those roles?
3. What happens when we emphasize the mutuality and honor that the gospel affords both men and women, but fail to recognize and maintain biblical distinctions?
4. Describe how a gospel-centered marriage would be far different from a traditional marriage?
5. Describe how a gospel-centered marriage would be far different from a modern marriage?
6. What is the most challenging thing you were confronted with in this study?
7. What are some steps you can take to demonstrate the gospel is better in your marriage? ...in your family? ...in our fellowship?