

How to treat other Christians

Paul and the New Testament place a special emphasis on behavior and conduct that believers should exhibit toward one another. While there are a plethora of passages to examine for this teaching, in this lecture we will stick to three:

1. Do not offend other believers
2. Do not sue one another
3. Preserve the unity of the body

1. Don't offend other believers - Romans 14-15:7

In chapter 14, Paul identifies two groups of people in the faith, the "weak" (14:1) and the "strong" (15:1). There are two issues that are causing division and strife within the body of believers in Rome. These two issues are: what a person may or may not eat and which day should be consecrated to the Lord. Though the identities of the "strong" and "weak" are not explicitly mentioned, because of the issues mentioned, it is likely the "weak" are Jewish Christians and the "strong" are Gentile Christians (liberated Jewish Christians). While Gentile and some Jewish Christians embraced eating all food and not observing Saturday as a day for God, other Jewish Christians held onto the ritual of not eating unclean meat and observing the Sabbath. The result is in verse three. The "strong" look down on the weak, and the "weak" judge the "strong." Paul's solution to this is as follows:

1. No one has the right to judge one another because all of us will have to stand before the judgement seat of God. Only God can judge (14:4, 10-12).
2. God has accepted both groups, the "weak" and the "strong;" both are in the faith (14:3).
3. Because God accepts both groups, whatever a person feels peace with in his mind is acceptable before God, because he does it for the Lord (14:5-6).
4. Our lives are not meant to be lived for ourselves but for the Lord (14:7-9).

"and he died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf" - 2 Cor. 5:15

He concludes that because of these things, we should not judge one another nor should we cause our fellow brethren to stumble. He agrees with the point of view of the "strong" (14:14), but he follows if someone else doesn't believe that, then it is ok.

The principle of the passage remains true today, the problem and solution. While most of contemporary Christendom doesn't struggle with the issue of food laws and Sabbath observances, there are other peripheral issues that cause division: interpretations of the creation accounts, interpretations on prophecy.... **Not all doctrines are created equal.**

2. Don't sue one another - 1 Corinthian 6:1-11

In this passage, Paul addresses an unspecified incident between two people in the church. Whatever the discrepancy was, they ended going before the Roman pagan court system, and Paul chastises them and the community for letting it get that far. For Paul, this incident is a complete failure for the church for several reasons. Paul views this situation in light of the eschatological reality of the people of God. Notice how Paul states:

“Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” - 6:2a

“Do you not know that we will judge angels?” - 6:3a

In other words, the people of God will judge the world one day, so why would they allow themselves to be judged before “the unrighteous” and “unbelievers”? Those outside the church have no business dealing with matters between believers; they have no authority. Next, he turns his attention to the community for letting this matter get to this point (6:5-7). The community failed to handle the problem themselves. It was brought before secular courts, and the result was a defeat for the church. The church is supposed to be different. In verse 7, he says there shouldn't be any lawsuits with one another, but if it happens, why not just be wronged? In other words, Paul is imploring them implicitly not to return evil for evil. He finishes with a warning and encouragement saying that those who wrong and defraud are in danger of losing their inheritance (6:9-10), but that this is not who they are anymore. Paul can be summarized as the following:

1. In light of the saints ruling the world and angels, the matters of this life are trivial in comparison and are to be handled by fellow believers (6:2-3)
2. Pagan rulers have no authority or standing to judge between believers, since they themselves will judge the world (6:4)
3. The community has a responsibility to diffuse a situation and not to let it go before a secular court (6:5)
4. Christians shouldn't even have lawsuits against each other to begin with! And if there is any wrong doing between people, don't return evil with evil (6:7)

3. Preserve the unity of the body - Ephesians 4:1-6

This small section includes an exhortation to live right, what living rightly constitutes, and the basis for achieving unity in the body. The author begins by stating that believers should live in a manner that is reflective of the calling with which they have been called. This call has been explained in the previous three chapters. The next verse explains what this looks like: humility, gentleness, patience, and being tolerant with another in love. When we abandon these, we are no longer walking in the way God has planned for us. In addition, we should earnestly seek to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Lastly, verses 4-6 provide the basis for the believers' unity. Why should we be unified? Because there is:

One body

One spirit

One hope of your calling

One Lord

One faith

One baptism

One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Household Code

In Martin Luther's smaller catechism, he described household relations as *haustafel* (house table). Based on this, New Testament scholars use the term "household code" to refer to the texts, especially in Paul's writings, where we find teaching about the various relationships of the household, including husband and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. Before discussing the household codes, we need to first look at what the Apostle Paul teaches about Christian singleness and marriage.

1 Singleness and Marriage

On the one hand, some Corinthian Christians thought what they did with their bodies didn't matter (hedonism). On the other, some believed that all bodily pleasures were sinful (asceticism). In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul masterfully explains that what we do in the body matters to God, especially sexually. In chapter 7, he works through four categories of life-situations and teaches how to serve Christ in each.

1 Corinthians 6:12-13

12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both one and the other." The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

These are slogans that some of the Corinthian Christians used to justify loose living. Here Paul quotes a slogan then responds to it.

v12a "All things are lawful for me"
but not all things are helpful

v12b "All things are lawful for me"
but I will not be dominated by anything

v13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food but God will destroy both one and the other."¹

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body

Paul's main point is that our bodies aren't for sexual immorality but for the Lord. How radical is this little statement? "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body." Our bodies are not any longer ours to do with as we please. Once we join the "body of Christ," our bodies belong to his body. Thus, what we do affects him, and what he does affects us.

1 Corinthians 6:14-20 God cares about your body, not just your mind. We see here four reasons why we should not indulge in sexual immorality:

1. Even in resurrection, you are embodied.

¹ There's a discrepancy between translators as to how much of this is their slogan and when Paul's rejoinder begins. The ESV ends sees the slogan as "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," whereas the NET sees the slogan as including "and God will destroy both one and the other" as well. I'm inclined to agree with the latter since Paul's whole point is that God is going to resurrect (not destroy) the body, so it matters what we do in our bodies.

2. You are one flesh with Christ and whoever you sleep with.
3. Your body is a temple of the holy spirit.
4. You are not your own but purchased by God for His glory.

Now in 1 Corinthians 7, we bring this sanctified body understanding into the variegated complexities of human relationships. Here is a summary of what this thorough chapter covers:

Verses	Situation	Teaching
7:1-6	spouses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better to marry than have extra-marital sex • spouses should not deprive each other of conjugal rights • each has mutual authority over the other person's body
7:7-9	singles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • singleness is preferable to marriage • it is good to remain single like Paul • but if self-control is too difficult, then get married
7:10-16	spouses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if married to a believer, don't separate • but, if you do, remain unmarried or reconcile • if married to an unbeliever, don't separate • the believer sanctifies the whole household • if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so, you are not enslaved • after all, you may convert your spouse eventually
7:17-28	all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stay in whatever situation in life in which you were called • if single, stay single • if married, stay married • if divorced, stay single • but, if you marry, it is not sin
7:29-35	singles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time is short for an impending crisis (cf. v. 26) • present shape of this world is passing away • better to be free from concern • singles can singly please the Lord without worrying about a spouse
7:36-38	engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if passions are strong, then let them marry; it is not sin • better to refrain from marriage

7:39-40	widows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • she is free to remarry • she is happier if she remains single
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2 Household Codes

Now that we've considered marriage and singleness, we can begin to consider the household codes. However, first it's important to lay out the biblical value God assigns to each life-situation.

Galatians 3:28

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

When it comes to how God sees us, we are equal. We have equal value, dignity, and worth. He has torn down the ethnic, status, and gender barriers in Christ! What does this mean for the household?

role	Ephesians	Colossians
wives	5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.	18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
husbands	25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is	19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

	<p>profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.</p>	
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Comparable Household Codes

Before diving and deeply considering these instructions, we should first familiarize ourselves with the ways that ancient people wrote and thought about the household. Here are four sources outside of the Bible to give you a flavor for how Greeks, Romans, and Jews thought:

Aristotle (Greek Philosopher, 4th century BC):

“Household management (οἰκονομία) falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed; and the household in its perfect form consists of slaves and freemen. The investigation of everything should begin with its smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children...And since, as we saw,⁴³ the science of household management has three divisions, one the relation of master to slave, of which we have spoken before, one the paternal relation, and the third the conjugal—for it is a part of the household science to rule over wife and children (over both as over freemen, yet not with the same mode of government, but over the wife to exercise republican government and over the children monarchical; for the male is by nature better fitted to command than the female (except in some cases where their union has been formed contrary to nature) and the older and fully developed person than the younger and immature. It is true that in most cases of republican government the ruler and the ruled interchange in turn (for they tend to be on in equal level in their nature and to have no difference at all), although nevertheless during the period when one is ruler and the other ruled they seek to have a distinction by means of insignia and titles and honors, just as Amasis made his speech about the foot-bath; but the male stands in this relationship to the female continuously. The rule of the father over the children on the other hand is that of a king; for the male parent is the ruler in virtue both of affection and of seniority, which is characteristic of royal government (and therefore Homer finely designated Zeus by the words “father of men and gods,” as the king of them all).”²

Roman Law of Paterfamilias (from time of the Republic through imperial times)

“The theoretical powers of the father in the early Republic were unbounded. A *paterfamilias* (male head of the household with no living father or grandfather) held *paterpotestas*, powers of life and death over all family members, including his slaves and most of his freedmen. In theory, a father could beat his son although the latter might be middle-aged and hold high office...The *paterfamilias*

² Aristotle, *Politics 1* in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 21, translated by H. Rackham, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1944).

nonetheless retained the key right to accept—or occasionally reject, if the boy was deformed or of dubious paternity—every newborn child laid at his feet.”³

Philo of Alexandria (educated Jewish philosopher living in the 1st century AD)

“...if you ask any one of them [Jews] about their national laws or customs, they can all tell you at once, without any difficulty; and the husband appears to be a master, endowed with sufficient authority to explain these laws to his wife, a father to teach them to his children, and a master to his servants.”⁴

Flavius Josephus (Jewish historian who lived in the 1st century AD)

“For, says the Scripture, “A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.” {x} Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so, that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God has given the authority to the husband. A husband, therefore, is to lie only with his wife whom he has married; but to have to do with another man's wife is a wicked thing; which, if anyone ventures upon, death is inevitably his punishment: no more can he avoid the same who forces a virgin betrothed to another man, or entices another man's wife.”⁵

What Paul writes in Ephesians and Colossians is at once similar and radically different from these authors. In the biblical household codes, we see the importance of a well-ordered household. Everyone has a role and needs to know how to operate within the boundaries of that function. We should also keep in mind that Paul knows that unbelievers would see how Christians arrange their households and would probably judge the value of Christianity based on how ordered their households are (after all, church services typically happened in homes).⁶ From the outside, Christian households resembled Jewish, Greek, and Roman ones, but from the inside, it was a whole other story.

Before moving ahead to much further, we must address the ‘s’ word—“submission.” Our egalitarian society scoffs at words like “submit,” “subservient,” and “servile” since they conjure up the horrifying images of the African slave trade, abusive husbands, and sexually harassing bosses. However, we have to be careful not to judge every other culture based on our own collective biases (ethnocentrism). From a

³ Nigel Rodgers, “Marriage, Divorce and the Power of the Father,” in *Roman Empire* (NY: Metro Books 2013), p. 468.

⁴ Philo, *Hypothetica* 7.14 in *The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1997), p. 744.

⁵ Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.201 in *Complete Works of Josephus* translate by William Whiston (1828).

⁶ Christians suffered persecution from outsiders because Christianity was new, small, vulnerable, and offensive. The Roman Empire was not keen on new religious movement, especially from the east. As a minority, those who targeted Christians were able to get away with it. Early on Christianity had no benefactors at the highest levels of society to offer protections. Also, Christians claimed the Greek and Roman worshiped false gods. To make matters worse, critics accused Christians of cannibalism (for eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ) and incest (for greeting each other with a kiss and having closed meetings). For all of these reasons, Christians in the first and second centuries spent a great deal of time defending themselves. The household code made it so outsiders observing the Christian household would recognize it as traditional and non-offensive. However, from the inside, the Christian household radically limited abuses and breathed fresh air into the roles by giving sacred meaning to them. Husbands are to be like Christ, wives like the church, and unfairly treated slaves like Christ on the cross. This concern is not explicitly present in Ephesians 5 or Colossians 3, but is plain in 1 Peter 3.

biblical perspective, there's nothing inherently wrong with submission. In fact, everyone submits. The very first step in becoming a Christian is to confess "Jesus as Lord" (Romans 10:9). This is a profession of obedience. If Jesus is your Lord, then you've given up your privilege to decide how to live. This is weighty, but awesome. It's weighty in that you're consigning your will, your future, your autonomy over to someone else. It's awesome because Jesus is a wise ruler who knows better than we do how to live and how to relate to God. Furthermore, Jesus is not a cruel master, but a loving older brother who has already given everything for us. What's more, Jesus wasn't free to do whatever he wanted either. Even he submitted to the Father. At no time is this clearer than when he wrestled with God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). After submitting himself to God's will even though he knew it would cause him excruciating physical suffering and ultimately the loss of his life, he "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Jesus is our example.

Wives

Within the household, a wife submits to her husband as the church does to Christ. However, it's important to note that submission to God and Christ always supersedes submission to the husband (Luke 14:26). Thus, a wife should not follow her husband into worshipping idols in a Hindu temple or doing something God says is wrong.

Emerson Eggerichs (Christian counselor and marriage expert)

"The University of Washington studied 2,000 couples for 20 years and discovered that the key to a successful relationship is love and respect...We asked 7,000 people this question, 'When you are in a conflict with your spouse or a significant other, do you feel unloved or disrespected?' 83% of the men said 'disrespected' and 72% of the women said 'unloved.'"⁷

Husbands

Paul is "traditional" in asserting male headship in the family, and, at the same time, he's radical in that he teaches servant leadership. Jesus put it this way:

Luke 22:25-27

25 And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. 27 For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

The husband leads, but not in a domineering or self-serving way. He leads as Christ led the church—motivated by self-sacrificial love.

Craig Blomberg (New Testament professor at Denver Seminary)

⁷ Emerson Eggerichs, loveandrespect.com, welcome video, accessed March 5, 2018.

“This kind of ‘complementarian’ marriage will not look dramatically different from an egalitarian marriage, except that, in the case of an impasse in decision-making, loving one’s wife as Christ loved the church means taking the lead to put her interests *above* the husband’s (giving ‘himself up for her’ -v. 25)!...Thus, on the one hand, Paul preserves the husband’s authority by grounding it in the ‘new creation’ model of Christ’s love for the church. On the other hand, he gives it a substantially new look by presenting it as a self-sacrifice for one’s wife by means of that very same model.”⁸

role	Ephesians	Colossians
children	6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."	20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
fathers	4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.	21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Children and Parents

It is so important that we teach our children to obey. Just imagine how many problems in our society we could fix if we could somehow get fathers to marry their children’s mothers, be involved in their kids’ lives, and teach them to obey. If a child acts in a dishonoring or disrespectful way, whose fault is it? Has any taught as well as modeled obedience and respect? It’s the parents’ responsibility to communicate what God expects of their children. However, Paul specifically calls out fathers who are too harsh. He tells them don’t provoke your kids but bring them up in discipline and instruction.

role	Ephesians	Colossians	1 Timothy	Titus
slaves	5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of	22 Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not	6:1 Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters	2:9 Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything;

⁸ Craig Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers 2006), p. 318.

	<p>eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or is free.</p>	<p>by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.</p>	<p>as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. 2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things.</p>	<p>they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.</p>
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Slaves

Paul’s dealing with a ubiquitous institution, abolition, is nowhere in view. Slaves made several failed attempts at violent revolutions in the Roman Empire. However, slavery was and remained for many centuries an accepted institution. Here the Scriptures do not challenge the system, instead they explain how to live as a Christian within that system, whether master or slave. We know from other Scriptures that Paul was not neutral towards slavery. In fact, in a bold way, he flips slavery on its head.

1 Corinthians 7:20-23

20 Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. 21 Were you called as a slave? Do not worry about it. But if indeed you are able to be free, make the most of the opportunity. 22 For the one who was called in the Lord as a slave is the Lord's freedman. In the same way, the one

who was called as a free person is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought with a price. Do not become slaves of men.

The free person is Christ's slave! Thus, the free are not absolutely free, since they serve Christ. Oppositely, the slave finds freedom in Christ. We see here the seeds of the abolition movements of the 1800s.

role	Ephesians	Colossians
masters	6:9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.	4:1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Masters

The biggest issues for masters is they were unfair and abusive. Here we learned that masters should not become prideful but remember who they submit to as well. Furthermore, in Paul's epistle to Philemon, he essentially instructs a master to free his runaway slave, Onesimus, and accept him as an equal brother in Christ.

3 Roles in the Church

Just as people have households, so all of God's children belong to his household. Just as God has ordained a proper place for everyone in a human household, so God has ordained certain specific roles or functions within his household.

men	pray/prophesy with head uncovered (1 Cor 11:2-4, 7-9) pray, lifting holy hands w/o anger (1 Tim 2:8)
women	pray/prophesy with head covered ⁹ (1 Cor 11:5-6, 10-15) be modest, respectable (1 Tim 2:9-10) learn quietly, not teaching or exercising authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Cor 14:34-36)

⁹ This probably only refers to married women, and it might relate to a cultural practice, though he roots his reasoning in creation.

	saved through childbearing (1 Tim 2:15)
older men	sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, in steadfastness (Tit 2:2)
older women	reverent behavior, not slanderers, not enslaved to wine, teaching what is good to young women (Tit 2:3-4)
younger men	love their husbands and children, be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, submissive to their husbands (Tit 2:4-5)
younger women	self-controlled (Tit 2:6)

We will return to the role of clergy in a later class.

The result here is that God’s household, especially as seen in the church service, would be ordered and characterized by respect and mutual loving submission.

Ephesians 5:2, 18-21

2 Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God...be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.