

Questions week beginning 10 March 2024

On Sunday we looked at Colossians 3:18-4:1 (and Ephesians 5:21-33) which refer to what theologians call “the Household code”. The relationships that it covers (wives & husbands, children & parents, slaves & masters) have provoked much debate, disagreement and distorted teaching over the years. The questions below are intended to help us grapple with Paul’s sometimes complicated teaching relating to husbands, wives and marriage but you may prefer to read the texts above and discuss one of the other areas without any set questions or have an open discussion on the texts in their entirety. Please choose whichever path best suits your group.

READ Colossians 3:18- 4:1 and then READ Ephesians 5:21-33

SUBMISSION

In Ephesians 5:17, Paul’s words to wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves and masters are preceded by an instruction to “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*”. This reminds us that whatever we do to others is meant to be part of our offering to Christ. What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the words ‘submit’ or ‘submission’?

WIVES

1. Some respond to Paul’s words about wives submitting to their husbands as:
 - i. An indication that as an unmarried man he was sexist, chauvinistic, and even misogynistic towards women.
 - ii. An instruction to adopt the patriarchal culture of Paul’s day so can be ignored today
 - iii. A command that should be adhered to by all wives today regardless of how their husband treats them
 - iv. A call for wives to accept with gratitude God’s ordained role in marriage that the husband should lovingly care and provide for his wife so that she feels accepted and safe.

How do you understand these instructions to Christian wives and their relevance within Christian marriage today?

2. In Ephesians 5:24 Paul says that wives should submit to their husbands “*in everything*” and in v33 that she must “*respect her husband*”. In Colossians 3:19 Paul instructs husbands to love their wives and not to be “*harsh toward her*”. What should a Christian wife’s response be if their husband **doesn’t** love her and **is** harsh toward her? (NB we will discuss the husband regarding this matter later)
3. How would you summarize what it means to be a good and godly wife?

HUSBANDS

4. In Ephesians Paul sees marriage as being a symbolic picture of Christ’s love for His church and calls for husbands to mirror that love.
 - i. Jesus being the “*the head of the Church*” is a fairly easy concept to grasp but Paul says in the same way the husband is “*the head of the wife*” (v23). What does that mean?
 - ii. Paul describes Jesus’ love for His church as one where He “*gave himself up for her*” and calls for husbands to love their wives in the same way (v25). What might that look like in practice?
 - iii. As previously mentioned, in Colossians 3:19 Paul instructs husbands to love their wives and “*not be harsh with them*”. Why would Paul need to give such an instruction? Surely a Christian man would love the woman he has married, and would be kind towards her, wouldn’t he? If not, why not?
5. How would you summarize what it means to be a good and godly husband?

MARRIAGE

6. In Matthew 22:30 Jesus said, “*At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage*”. In Ephesians 5:31-32 Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 about becoming “*one flesh*” which we normally associate with husbands and wives but Paul says he is talking about Christ and the Church (v32).
 - i. What does becoming “*one flesh*” mean in marriage? In what way are we “*one flesh*” with Christ?
 - ii. Why do you think marriage will not take place in heaven?
 - iii. Do you think we will recognise our formal marital partners in heaven?
7. The Baptist Union Council is due to meet on 19-20 March. It is understood that it will be discussing the response from its recent consultation with churches concerning the request by some to change the definition of marriage within the ministerial rules by removing the reference to marriage being only between a man and a woman. Please pray for their discussion and for the subsequent response from BU Churches in the light of any decisions that the Council may make regarding the matter.