

P.T. O'BRIAN said: “*Spiritual renewal refers not simply to an individual change of character, but also to a corporate recreation of humanity in the Creator’s image*¹.” A proper application of **O'BRIAN'S** observation can be made when considering today’s passage: **COLOSSIANS 3:18 – 4:1**, for the regeneration of individuals cannot help but create new relationships, be they in the home, the Church, or in any other environment where human beings interact.

Our approach today will be different from our normal focus on verse-by-verse, word-by-word exegesis of the text. We will engage with the text, but we will spend the majority of our time this morning looking at the theological background that is necessary for a clear understanding of what **PAUL** is teaching us in this section of his Letter to the Colossians. In today’s lesson we will see how God, in His divine plan, has arranged certain human relationships; these include:

- (1) *The relationship between husbands and wives ...*
- (2) *The relationship of parents and children, and ...*
- (3) *The relationship of masters and slaves.*

Now most of us have no issue with God setting parents in a position of authority over their children ... but setting husbands in a position of authority in the home, and the obvious moral issues associated with slavery, run contrary to the natural inclinations of 21st Century Western thought.

Understanding how to interpret passages like this one requires us to understand more than just the text itself; we must look into how these arrangements fit into the overall plan of God. So we will employ **THE PRINCIPLE OF FIRST OCCURENCE** – *an interpretive tool that seeks to explain difficult points of doctrine by examining the first occurrence of the doctrine in order to extrapolate a more perfect understanding of how later occurrences should be understood and applied.* Usually this involves looking into the Old Testament for guidance.

We must recognize that *‘divine revelation is progressive revelation.’* God did not reveal the entire Bible to us at one time; *He did it over a period of approximately 1,500-years through the hands of multiple human authors.*

This often means in order to understand something in the later writings of Scripture, *we must return to first occurrences in order to gain an understanding of how the principle in question was presented initially* – and this will guide how we approach these verses in **COLOSSIANS**.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF HUSBAND AND WIFE IN THE HOME

COLOSSIANS 3:18-19 emphasizes Christ-centered relationships within the home, particularly the dynamic between husbands and wives. Other biblical passages, Old Testament context, and theological foundations, highlight the concept of divine authority and order.

BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS ON MARRIAGE — **COLOSSIANS 3:18** calls for wives to submit to their husbands *‘as is fitting in the Lord.’* This aligns with other Scriptures, such as **EPHESIANS 5:22-24** and **1 CORINTHIANS 11:3**, which outline a hierarchical structure of divine authority: God the Father, Christ, man, and woman.

TERMINOLOGY AND CONTEXT — Key Greek terms like ἀνὴρ (*pronounced anér, meaning man/husband*) and γυναῖκα (*pronounced gunē, meaning woman/wife*) contrast and clarify gender roles. Ἀνὴρ is used to contrast and emphasize the distinctions between men and women. It also can be used to contrast an adult male and a boy, *i.e., ‘man’ instead of ‘a child.’* In this sense, it is the equivalent of our term *‘adult.’*

¹ O’Brian, P.T., *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, Pg. 191.

The concept of delegated authority within marriage is presented as analogous to Christ's relationship with the Church.

CHURCH PRACTICES AND DOCTRINAL POSITIONS — Questions about women's roles in church leadership (e.g., *servant as elders or deacons*) are tied to these theological principles.

In the Grace Bible Church Doctrinal Statement, the section titled 'Christian Marriage,' reads: "*We believe the ultimate expression of God's design for marriage is between a Christian man and a Christian woman in that their marriage reflects Christ's relationship to the Church.*"

What makes this sentence accurate *as stated* is the title of the section: 'Marriage and the Christian Home,' plus the phrase, 'the ultimate expression of God's design for marriage.'

What our doctrinal statement is defining is 'a Christian Marriage.' *But marriage is not solely a Christian Institution; it is a Divine Institution – one of four such institutions designed to protect the human race during the time of the Angelic Conflict².* If God had designed marriage solely as a Christian Institution, then only Christians would marry – and that limitation is not born out in Scripture.

OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS: Understanding New Testament teachings regarding relationships in the home requires revisiting Old Testament passages (e.g., *Genesis 1-2*) for historical and theological grounding. **JESUS** Himself referenced **GENESIS** in **MATTHEW 19** to validate the divine design of marriage. He said:

Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and he will be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' – Matthew 19:4-6.

Here, **JESUS** references **GENESIS 1:27** and **GENESIS 2:24**. He links His understanding of marriage to the Creation – (specifically) to the Creation of male and female in what He calls, 'the beginning.'

So we need to go back to **GENESIS** and consider first **THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM AND EVE** before we can even think about answering the questions that arise from **COLOSSIANS 3:18** (or any of the other points mentioned in today's passage).

THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM AND EVE

THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM AND EVE is the necessary theological foundation stone for understanding relationships between husbands and wives. If we do not understand marriage in its origin and divine intent, we will end up with one misperception after another.

★**SO HERE IS THE FIRST PROPOSITION I WANT TO PUT FORTH:** **JESUS** treated **ADAM** and **EVE** as the first human couple in space and time. This is born out in **THE GOSPELS** and in the writings of **THE APOSTLES**.

In the genealogy of **JESUS** provided to us by the hand of **LUKE**, **THE FIRST MAN** is referred to as 'the son of God³,' which places **ADAM** in a line of historical figures leading up to **JESUS** – (*Luke 3:28*). Also, while not referring to **ADAM** by name, **PAUL** frequently discusses **ADAM'S ROLE** in the origin of human sinfulness and contrasts it with **JESUS'** role in salvation.

² *In His infinite wisdom, and for the protection of the human race, God established Four Divine Institutions: Volition, Marriage, Family, and Nationalism. Opposition to any of these four operative principles will bring severe discipline upon nations (cf. Leviticus 26), and ultimately upon the human race. In Satan's kingdom, all four of these are under demonic attack – and the severity of these attacks is increasing at a rapid pace. As believers, we must stand **FOR** all four of these divine institutions, and **AGAINST** any attacks our adversary brings against them – even when it is unpopular to do so.*

³ *Obviously by 'son of God,' he is not equating Adam with Jesus. What 'son of God' means here is 'Adam was directly created by God to stand at the head of the human race.'*

Listen to what PAUL writes in ROMANS CHAPTER FIVE: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin (so) death spread to all men, because all sinned” – Romans 5:12.

PAUL treats ADAM as a historical figure, which aligns with the theological tradition to which JESUS belongs – And he states this specifically in ROMANS 5 and then in 1 CORINTHIANS 15. For example, PAUL writes: “For as in ADAM all die, so also ALL WHO ARE IN CHRIST will be made alive” – 1 Corinthians 15:22. Then he says: “THE FIRST MAN (ADAM) (ἄνθρωπος – pronounced *ánthrōpos*), BECAME A LIVING SOUL, WHILE THE LAST ADAM (CHRIST) BECAME A LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT” – 1 Corinthians 15:45.

In both verses, PAUL assigns to ADAM the same degree of HISTORICITY as he assigns to JESUS. Also, in ROMANS 5:14, ADAM is viewed as being equally as historic as MOSES. ROMANS 5:15 further confirms THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM: “But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one (ADAM) the *many* died (*MANY* MEANS *THE HUMAN RACE*), much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, JESUS CHRIST, abound to the *many*” (THIS IS THE ELECT) – Romans 5:15.

There is A TRIPLE PARALLEL in this verse — confirming THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM, JESUS CHRIST, and YOU. So let me ask: ‘Are you a historical reality or some sort of allegory?’

This is not just a New Testament idea; PAUL’S assertion in 1 CORINTHIANS 15:45: “So it is written, the first man, ADAM, became a living soul,” cites GENESIS 2:7: “THE LORD GOD formed the man from dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living soul.”

In 1 TIMOTHY 2:13-14 we see this same assertion of HISTORICITY applied to EVE: “For it was ADAM who was first created and then EVE.” And it was not ADAM who was deceived but THE WOMAN being deceived, fell into transgression.”

Are you beginning to see the hole we dig for ourselves if we dispense with THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM AND EVE? Not only is ADAM in his transgression a historical figure, but EVE also is a historical figure in her rebellion and deception.

Listen to PAUL in 2 CORINTHIANS 11:8-9: “For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.”

THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM AND EVE is foundational to Christian theology and is supported both by biblical references and apostolic teachings.

Here is a summary of key points for consideration regarding THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS and ADAM:

(1) JESUS recognized ADAM AND EVE as the first humans in space and time, as evidenced by LUKE’S GENEALOGY linking ADAM to JESUS and identifying ADAM as ‘the son of God’ (see *ftnt. #3*) – Luke 3:28.

(2) PAUL’S THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATION:

- PAUL frequently discusses ADAM’S role in the origin of sin and contrasts it with JESUS’ role in salvation.
- Passages like Romans 5:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 15:22, and 15:45 affirm ADAM’S HISTORICITY, comparing him to JESUS and MOSES as equal historical figures.
- Romans 5:15 highlights ADAM’S TRANSGRESSION and JESUS’ GRACE, illustrating the parallel between their roles in human destiny.

(3) ADAM AND EVE IN OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT NARRATIVES:

- PAUL ties ADAM’S HISTORICITY to Genesis 2:7, stating that ADAM was formed from dust and became a living soul.

- In 1 Timothy 2:13-14, PAUL'S description of ADAM AND EVE confirms their creation order and EVE'S DECEPTION, reinforcing the reality of their historical existence.

(4) IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGY:

- Denying ADAM AND EVE'S HISTORICITY undermines the theological framework of sin, salvation, and human identity.
- Denying ADAM AND EVE'S HISTORICITY renders Romans 5:12-21 virtually impossible to interpret in any way that affects the human race today.
- The parallels drawn between ADAM, JESUS, and HUMANITY (*THE ELECT*), emphasize the interconnectedness of biblical history and doctrine.

THE CREATION OF EVE AND DELEGATED AUTHORITY IN ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

BIBLICAL REVELATION argues for the EQUALITY and COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN MARRIAGE.

(1) THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR EQUALITY AND COMPLEMENTARIAN ROLES:

- ADAM AND EVE'S CREATION in GENESIS underscores equality, as EVE was made from ADAM'S SIDE, symbolizing partnership and shared essence (*ADAM'S APPRAISAL OF EVE: 'Bone of my bones, Flesh of my flesh'*).
- The Hebrew word for 'HELPER' (עֲזָרָה pronounced – 'ezer') is used to describe EVE in Scripture. This term often refers to divine assistance, showing it is not a demeaning term (this is the case in 15 of its 21 occurrences in the Old Testament).

(2) MARRIAGE AS REFLECTING DIVINE UNITY:

- The union of man and woman in marriage reflects the unity within THE TRINITY. This conclusion is derived by comparing the usage of 'echad' (אֶחָד) both in Deuteronomy 6:4 and Genesis 2:24, where the term 'ONE' (אֶחָד) is used to denote – *not singularity – but 'a unity of plurals.'*
- Marriage demonstrates God's image as Trinity through mutual love and partnership, designed to reflect the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(3) SUBMISSION IN MARRIAGE:

- Submission (ὑποτάσσω – pronounced 'hupotássō') is a *voluntary* act performed by the wife; it is not a response to a demand from her husband. This is in alignment with the divine design.
- This submission exists alongside the command for husbands to love their wives sacrificially, as Christ loves the Church (*Ephesians 5:22 & 25*) – **These two commands CANNOT be viewed separately.**

(4) EQUALITY IN PERSONHOOD – DISTINCT IN FUNCTIONS:

- Among the members of the Trinity there is absolute equality, yet the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit play distinct roles in the outworking of the divine plan. These functional distinctions do not compromise in any way the value or nature of any member of the Godhead.
- Likewise, since marriage reflects the Trinity as an expression of God's Image, it too involves complementary roles without implying inferiority or diminished value.

(5) HUMANITY'S UNIQUE VALUE:

- The creation of man and woman in God's image sets humans apart, granting inherent worth both to men and to women equally, and it imparts to them the ability to reflect God's nature in relationships.

SLAVES TO MASTERS AND MASTERS TO SLAVES – COLOSSIANS 3:22 – 4:1

In both **EPHESIANS** and **COLOSSIANS**, **THE APOSTLE PAUL** addresses slavery within the broader context of existing **CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLD CODES** that provide instructions for various relationships within the family and community – specifically between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

Of course, regarding slavery, the looming question is *‘WHY DID PAUL NOT CONDEMN THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY OUTRIGHT?’* The simple answer is, **PAUL** did not believe his primary mission in the world was to reform the secular, **ROMAN EMPIRE** morally.

We also should note, the kind of slavery **PAUL** is addressing in **COLOSSIANS**, in **EPHESIANS SIX**, and in **THE BOOK OF PHILEMON**, was very different from the slavery that was practiced in **ENGLAND** and in **AMERICA** ... and as it still is practiced today in other parts of the world. **IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING, THE KIND OF INSTITUTIONALIZED SLAVERY THAT CHARACTERIZED ENGLAND AND AMERICA WAS EGREGIOUS. AND IT WAS A SIN WITHOUT EXCUSE.**

ROMAN SLAVERY was quite different – *Now don’t misunderstand what I am saying – These differences do not qualify as justifications for what took place in **ROME**, but they are worth noting:*

- The most obvious difference is **ROMAN SLAVERY** was not **RACE**-based. It had nothing to do with race.
- Also, many slaves ran businesses and handled the family’s financial affairs. **ROMAN SLAVERY** was not an institution that exclusively involved manual labor.
- Many of the slaves in **ROME** were captured prisoners of war, while others chose voluntarily to put themselves under temporary bond in order to pay debts that otherwise were beyond their means to pay⁴.

Beyond this, **PAUL** is addressing slaves who are Christians – and he is explaining how Christians should approach their job-responsibilities.

As already mentioned, as a moral baseline we should agree that **SLAVERY** as it was practiced in **ENGLAND** and **AMERICA** ... was **AN EGREGIOUS SIN**.

PAUL’S treatment of slavery in **COLOSSIANS**, **EPHESIANS SIX**, and in **THE BOOK OF PHILEMON**, reflects the social reality of **THE FIRST-CENTURY ROMAN EMPIRE**, where slavery was deeply entrenched in society, but **PAUL’S** teaching also points toward the radical Christian principles of equality, mutual respect, and love.

In **EPHESIANS 6:5-9**, **PAUL** addresses both **SLAVES** and their **EARTHLY MASTERS**. His instructions are framed within the broader context of **CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION AND SERVICE**, and therefore, the background material provided in our lesson regarding **HUSBANDS AND WIVES** and **PARENTS AND CHILDREN** also forms the backdrop for the relationship between **SLAVES** and their **EARTHLY MASTERS**.

(1) SLAVES (EPHESIANS 6:5-8): **PAUL** urges slaves to *‘obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ’ (vs. 5)*. The focus is on whole-hearted service, performed not just for human approval, but as an act of obedience to God. **PAUL** emphasizes that *‘the Lord will reward each one for whatever good he or she does’ (vs. 8)*, highlighting the concept that even a slave’s work has eternal significance when done with the right attitude.

⁴ There are provisions in the Old Testament for slaves to be given their freedom, and there are provisions for those who voluntarily chose to remain slaves for life.

In this passage, **PAUL** underscores the dignity and worth of slaves by associating their work with service to **CHRIST**. This was revolutionary in a culture that typically saw slaves as property or tools for labor.

(2) **MASTERS (EPHESIANS 6:9)**: **PAUL** also speaks to masters, telling them to *'treat your slaves fairly (vs. 9) — i.e., to act with fairness and respect without fear of threat*. The rationale is, both slaves and masters share a common Master in heaven, and *'there is no favoritism with Him' (vs. 9)*. This emphasizes that both the slave and the master are equal before God, and their earthly relationships should reflect this equality.

In **COLOSSIANS 3:22 – 4:1**, **PAUL** gives similar instructions but with slight differences in emphasis.

(3) **SLAVES (COLOSSIANS 3:22-25)**: As in **EPHESIANS**, **PAUL** tells slaves to *'obey your earthly masters in everything,'* and to do so *'not only when their eye is on you to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord' (vs. 22)*. The principle here is that slaves' obedience ultimately is to God, not to their human masters. **PAUL** again stresses that *'you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward' (vs. 24)*, reinforcing the idea expressed in **EPHESIANS** that all work has eternal value when done in the name of **CHRIST**.

PAUL also warns that *'all who do wrong will be repaid for their wrong actions' (vs. 25)*, indicating that God will repay injustice in all situations, even those injustices committed by or to slaves.

(4) **MASTERS (COLOSSIANS 4:1)**: To masters, **PAUL** says, *'provide your slaves with what is right and fair; because you know that you also have a Master in heaven' (Col. 4:1)*. Just as in **EPHESIANS**, **PAUL** calls on masters to treat their slaves justly, with the recognition that they too are accountable to God. *There is an inherent equality before God that should shape how both slaves and masters relate to each other. And remember, PAUL frequently referred to himself as 'a slave of Christ Jesus.'*

SUMMARY OF PAUL'S APPROACH:

(1) **EQUALITY BEFORE GOD** — Both in **EPHESIANS** and **COLOSSIANS**, **PAUL** emphasizes the spiritual equality of slaves and masters before God. He encourages masters to treat slaves justly and for slaves to work with a view to serving God rather than merely for human approval.

(2) **RADICAL CHRISTIAN TEACHING** — **PAUL'S** teachings on slavery may fall short of what 21st Century Western Culture might prefer, but in its historical context, his teaching was *subversive* in a number of ways. He stresses that slaves are not merely to be seen as property, but as people who can serve **CHRIST** and receive eternal rewards. Likewise, masters are reminded that they are accountable to God, which encourages them to treat slaves with fairness and respect.

(3) **THE CHRISTIAN TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES** — While **PAUL** does not explicitly call for the abolition of slavery in these letters, his instructions carry the implicit message that the Christian worldview — *emphasizing mutual respect, love, and equality before God* — should transform how slavery is practiced, with a view to its ultimate elimination.

This laid the groundwork for later Christian movements that would advocate for the abolition of slavery. Christian men like **WILLIAM WILBERFORCE** led the way to the abolishment of the institution of slavery. It was he who said, *"So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did its wickedness appear, that my own mind was completely made up for the abolition of slavery."*

Though **PAUL'S** treatment of slavery in **EPHESIANS** and **COLOSSIANS** does not directly call for the abolition of the institution — *but instead aims to reform the relationships within it by highlighting mutual respect, fairness and the spiritual equality of all people before God* — his teachings point toward a vision where Christian love and justice would eventually undermine the very foundations of slavery.