

What are you like, when you're at home???

Sometimes the nice friendly man / loving husband / encouraging Dad, that the church know, or the public get to see,, when he's at home, he's a completely different person... He might be the bloke that yells at his kids, and ignores his wife... or worse...

Or the happy, obliging wife that everyone knows when **she's** out in public, might be the winging, nagging, cranky woman at home...

This is what's called "hypocrisy" – it's when we put on a mask, to present a different image, to who we truly are. And usually, the ones who know us best – the ones who know us when we **don't** have our mask on, are those we live with...

There's been a few times, when our family have taken in a boarder into our home. And these have been the times when I have been acutely aware, that somebody else is getting an inside view, of the real Brumpton household...

And, I guess I've always been aware, "Is the father my children know, the same as the bloke you know at church???"
Probably not...

And so, Paul's been talking about how we take off self, and put on Christ... And we've just had an image of what this looks like in the Christian church... But today is where we realise that what he's describing, isn't pretend – it's not a mask – this is a true changing of the heart. If Christ is truly living in me, the ones I live with, are going to notice it.

And so today we get an image of Christ-likeness in the home... And what I really notice here, is it's not about "self" – it's all about loving and serving the "other", for the sake of Christ (even if they don't deserve it)...

So, he begins with a word to "wives". *About this time last year, we studied 1 Peter 3, which begins in a very similar way to how this reading begins. And some of you might remember (for WPH&S reasons) I put on my old motorbike helmet. I'm not going to do that today (it doesn't take long for a joke to get old...).*

V¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Men and women, are different. Husbands and wives are different (some of you may have noticed this). Within a marriage, the role of the husband, and the role of the wife, are quite different. One isn't better than the other – they're just different.

To submit, means "to be subject to"...

Now, if you're married, you know as well as I do, that husbands and wives don't always agree. Part of the marriage relationship is that we work together, for the good of the other. But there will be times, where you disagree. What happens when you're at an impasse???

Well, the world's way, is

- “The most dominant one makes the decision.”; or
- the overbearing one rules the marriage; or
- the most calculating, conniving one, twists things to get their own way; or
- the one who holds the other to ransom...

That's the world's way, whether it be the man or the woman who is the most domineering... But that's not God's way. God's way, is to choose to honour the lord. And in this case, it's not about:

- asserting one's own power;
- demanding one's own way;

What is fitting in the Lord, is for the wife to forgo her own way, and to let her husband lead. That's what it means to submit...

But let me be clear: this is not a husband **domineering** and **forcing** his wife to submit – This is an example of the meekness and humility we talked about a couple of weeks ago. Because the Christian wife, has taken off self, and put on Christ, she chooses to submit to her husband...

What a beautiful thing... A beautiful giving up of self, to give honour and give leadership to the other, is beautiful... But it's pretty ugly, when either the husband or the wife, put themselves first and demand their rights...

And how ugly it is, when a husband dominates, as if his wife is beneath him,, or when a wife stands on her digs, and says “I'm going to make the decisions around here”...

God chose the marriage relationship to be the metaphor/image of the relationship between Christ and His church... And what a beautiful image it is. We look forward to the time when we (the saints of Jesus Christ) will be presented to Christ as His bride (pure and holy, dressed in white)...

And just as we (men and women / husbands and wives / boys and girls) submit to Christ, wives submit to husbands.

During the week, I rang Mark (Beerwah) to say "G'day", because I haven't talked with him for a while. Mark and Sue listen in to BD pretty much every week. And they pray for us... Isn't that humbling/wonderful... Anyway, I told him what we were going to be studying this week, and I said, "I'll personalise it for you" ... And I sorta might've led him to believe I was going to say "Sue, submit to Mark." ... but I thought I might personalise it like this: "Mark, love Sue, and do not be harsh with her."

You know, some folk get offended and all hot-under-the-collar, with the words "**Wives, submit to your husbands**", but the greatest cost and the greatest service, is actually reserved for the Husbands...

V¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. and not many of us realise, what this command is really saying...

What sort of love are husbands commanded to have for their wives? In the Greek, this isn't the erotic love, or even the friendship love (although both of those are needed within a

marriage. Husbands and wives, you are to be lovers and friends)..

But the kind of love he's commanding husbands to have for their wife, is the sort of love that Christ has for His church. It's the love that always gives of self, and puts the other first... It's not a selfish love. It's not the sort of love where I'm looking to see what I can get out of it...

When a husband (in grace), sacrifices of himself, to cherish his wife, that's the sort of love we're talking about... And when we realise this, the phrase "**and do not be harsh with them**", is pretty-much redundant really, isn't it... Because if as a husband, I'm loving my wife in this self-giving way, harshness is never going to enter into it....

And when a husband **is** loving his wife (giving himself for her), that's the sort of husband, whom it is a blessing to submit to...

Let's move on. Next comes a word to "children": Now, every commentary I read all agree, that this is a word to "minors". It's a word to children who are not yet grown up.

e.g. My sons continue to be my children, but they're not children.

This is about little people. I've been looking up at my sons for quite a while now. They grew up (you see), and moved out to begin their own life, and now they're married with their own children, they became adults in their own right. I am no

longer responsible for controlling my children / disciplining / directing them...

But for children who **are** still under the authority of their parents, the word is, **obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.**

Isn't this amazing: Paul's writing to a church. And children are included in this. They're not ignored. They're not looked down upon as nobodies... And children can be Christians too... Children can take off the old rebellious self, and put on Christ... And the word to Christian children, is "obey your parents in everything" why? Because they're always right? No... Simply because it **pleases the Lord.**

And there's a word also, to parents (or at least it's addressed to "fathers" [the normal disciplinarian])...

²¹ **Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.**

As parents, and particularly as dads, our job is to bring up our children, and to train our children in the ways of the Lord... But some parents are never happy with their kids... Their kids are left feeling "nothing I do is ever good enough"...

Let's never be that sort of parent. Take joy in your kids, and love them. Encourage them. And don't leave them feeling "exasperated"...

Righto: Now, at this point, the letter is still addressing “households” (and Christian living in the home). But now he’s talking to household slaves, which is a bit different for us, isn’t it...

None of us here are slaves, and none of us here are slave-owners. (*what did your last slave die of*). But what we cannot escape learning here, is how thoroughly transforming it is to become a Christian... Stick with me, and you’ll see why.

But let’s get this bit really clear. Paul is **not** saying, that slavery is a good thing, or that we should own slaves. Anyone who says that the Scriptures promote slavery are being mischievous and dishonest...

Paul is addressing a pagan culture here, and slavery was part of their culture... But when he spoke to these slaves/bondservants, he didn’t say “Christ has set you free, so run away and enjoy your freedom”. He said the exact opposite.

But in this topic of slavery (although, it’s not a topic of slavery – it’s about Christians who happen to be slaves), he acknowledges that some have “earthly masters”, but he turns our thoughts to **Christ**, Who is our Lord and master...

I suppose, when it comes to earthly masters, sometimes they could be cruel. They can be demanding and unreasonable... But Paul says to obey them, and not just when they’re watching...

Now, for those who have been employees in medium to large workplaces, you'd be very aware, that some employees put in the bare minimum effort, but while the boss is watching, they're going hard... And as is often the way, those who can talk-the-talk, but know nothing, often get promoted, while the skilled hard workers never get noticed... It was no different for slaves..

And what Paul tells these slaves, is ²³ **Whatever you do, work heartily (put in the effort), (as if you're working) for the Lord and not for men**

Why would they do that??? Why? What's the advantage? What advantage is there for me to work hard, and not slack off when the boss isn't watching??? (particularly if I'm not getting paid for it)

Well, it's being a witness for Christ... We have a master who **is** watching. And no matter what your job, I'm pretty sure we've all got it better than those who are slaves... But even for a slave, as a slave, there's nothing to inherit/no reward... Except for the greatest inheritance of all. They are to work, knowing that from the Lord, they will receive a heavenly inheritance, because they are serving Christ...

Did you know, that you can serve Christ, in your workplace... Some people feel that to serve Christ, they have to become a:

- minister
- pastor
- missionary;
- chaplain.

But you can serve Christ in your workplace.

- How we conduct ourselves;
- Giving our boss (or our customers), value...
- Being fair and just
- working hard, for those in authority over us –
this is serving Christ...

And V25 says: ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

It doesn't matter whether you're a:

- slave;
- employee;
- employer;
- sole trader;
- slave-master

The wrongdoer will be judged by the Lord. There's no favouritism/partiality...

And the slaves could take comfort in knowing this. If they are unjustly treated by their masters, the Lord is the one who will judge...

And we can take comfort in this too... If **w**e are treated unjustly, we don't stand up and retaliate. The Lord's got this in hand...

But in 4:1 (BTW, I'm not sure why anyone would put a chapter-break in here – it's a totally illogical place to put a chapter-break...

But in 4:1, there's a word for the masters...

4 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

In any society, there are different levels of status and privilege. Some will have a:

- privileged position;
- lowly position;

- good head-start; while others
- strive and struggle for much of their working life, to get themselves to a financial position, about where the privileged began;

- battlers, always doing it tough;
- like the Midas touch, where everything's a success;

- personality and an ability manage & do it well; others
- they're good with their hands

And the word here, is, "If I'm in a privileged position, like a:

- master;
- business owner;
- employer;
- manager;

Whatever we do – however we use our privilege/position/authority, do it justly and fairly, knowing that [we] also have a Master in heaven.

Let's wrap it up:

I said right at the beginning, *“What kept coming through to me in this reading, is that when we “take off self and put on Christ”, we truly do “take off self and put on Christ””*. (This isn't an empty phrase)... There is no “self” here... Living as disciples of Jesus (in our homes), is putting the other first.

- Wives submitting to their husbands, because this is fitting in the Lord;
- Husbands loving their wives sacrificially – giving yourself for her;
- Children, obeying their parents, because it pleases the Lord;
- Fathers, not discouraging their kids – not provoking them – Not putting them in a place where they feel that nothing they do is ever good enough...

But what about the advice to slaves??? This really strikes it home, doesn't it??? Can you imagine this?

We have freedom in Christ!!! But freedom in Christ doesn't have to equate to “present physical freedom” (Paul wrote this letter from prison). Our freedom, is freedom from sin. And the reward is the inheritance we look forward to... Freedom

in Christ, does not mean freedom in this world... For some it may... In fact, Onesimus, is one of Paul's brothers in Christ, he hand-picked to deliver this letter... Onesimus either is or was, a slave – a slave who ran away from his master (Philemon), and Paul sent him back, hoping that his Christian master would choose to set him free...

But even if Philemon didn't set him free, as a slave, Onesimus is special, because he belongs to Jesus... And even as a slave – even as someone who the world says “You don't deserve freedom” – even the most lowly, serve Christ, by working honourably in whatever position we find ourselves.

This is really challenging stuff... To take off self, and to put on Christ – is to become like Christ. And it's a shift of focus, from our worldly circumstances, to our heavenly future and reward...

Only a few paragraphs earlier, in V ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

This is what it's about: Christ is in:

- the Christian slave;
- the Christian slave master;
- the believing husband;
- the believing wife;
- believing children;
- the Christian employer;
- the Christian employee;

By His Holy Spirit, Christ is everything Christian, and by His Spirit, He is in you and I. In the Kingdom of God, no one is greater than the other, and so with thankfulness to Christ, we serve Him, in this life, looking forward to the coming glory.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank you that You have set us free.
And that this freedom –
this future glory we look forward to,
is something that no one can take from us.

We thank You for the coming Kingdom.
We thank You for the Christian fellowship;
and for our families and households.

Lord, as we live in this world, as:
your children;
and in our families;
and in our work places,
help us to honour You,
in the way we put others before ourselves.
And in the way we work, to give You glory.

Lord, help us to Honour You,
in all that we do,
Amen.