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# ALTERNATIVE REALITY

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## Part 5 - Alternative Society

There are more people trapped in slavery than ever before in human history. Over 50 million children, women and men are beaten, raped, and starved in an industry worth US\$150 billion globally. The enslavement and abuse of women and children was not uncommon either, to the Colossians when Paul wrote this letter to them in the first century AD.

### Alternative Relationships – Colossians 3:18-4:1

Ancient Rome was a man's world. In politics, society and the family, men held both the power and the purse-strings – they literally controlled whether others lived or died.

It's not hard to imagine how tensions rose and confusion reigned in the first century church that demanded a different counter cultural approach to that of the society at large.

Paul addresses a cultural reality within the church. He re-characterises the relationships that exist. He emphasises here in Colossians as well as his letters to the Ephesians and Corinthians that there are to be no distinctions in the church. In Christ, there is neither slave nor free, male or female, Jew or gentile, there is oneness found in Christ (Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 6:8).

While we could go into great detail about what Paul was saying to wives, husbands, children and slaves and masters (and get a lot out of it) – what strikes me in this passage is the alternative society Paul encourages is based on alternative relationships.

#### **Two main ideas:**

1. Paul again reiterates the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as if working for the Lord". As believers, Christ becomes the central point for all interpersonal relationships – love God and love others.
2. Paul challenges the social norm and calls people to a higher way – Christ's way. God is not bound by culture. In a society obsessed with power we are called to servant like relationships.

## **An Alternative Community**

Jesus' plan was to transform the world through an alternative community called the church (Acts 2:42-47), who acted counter culturally in their relationships.

There was to be a new community that followed the example set by the one they followed – Christ Jesus. Jesus said that He, the Son of Man: Came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for all (Mark 10:45).

There's a new community that remembers that Jesus treated women and children differently. To love God and love others (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5; Mark 12: 29-30) meant that all life is to be revered.

Jesus said to His followers, before He left the earth: Here's the strategy. I'm going to turn you loose with the help of the Holy Spirit!' He did and it changed the world!

## **When the Righteous Prosper**

*When the righteous prosper, it's good news for everybody.*  
(Proverbs 11:10)

*Righteous ones* = those who are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community.

Of course, the paradigm of this is Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 4:24). Jesus spent a lot of time redefining what it means to be "righteous." He used other pictures to illustrate it like; you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill—a new community that is infused with this kind of light—cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:13-14).

## **An Alternative Society**

Our mission is to be Kingdom Bearers (Matthew 6: 9-10). In the kingdom there is no class distinction.

While the world operates under rules of power in relationships that exploit –

Jesus says 'Not so with you' (Matthew 20:24-28).

He is calling for the creation of an alternative way of relating that will provide the stimulus for an alternative society; a society that expresses and incarnates an Alternative Kingdom.

There is nothing as attractive as followers of Jesus living as Kingdom people. When we live in the joy of our salvation, when we live in the freedom and certainty of how treasured and secure we are in Christ, we become good news to all people. When we treat people as Jesus did and as Paul encouraged the Colossians to, we become good news.

It's when people taste the Kingdom of heaven on earth that they are willing to sacrifice everything—their lives, their possessions—and they will do it with joy.

We are God's plan to subvert the Empire and it starts with how we live out our relationships – husbands to wives, wives to husbands; children to parents and parents to children; employer to employee and employee to employer!

## **Practical Steps to Alternative ways of Relating**

1. **Self Examine** - Be aware of how the rules of relationships from the empire may have crept into your way of relating to others (self-first, jealousy, promotion, power, greed, get ahead at all cost).
2. **Seek and Submit** – Surrender to God that part of you that you have taken control of. Repent and ask the Holy Spirit to make the necessary changes on the inside for you to change. Ask God to cleanse you from the problems and their root causes, and the sin and lies that are associated with them.
3. **Accept God's forgiveness** and replace lies with truth (eg. Lie – "If I show compassion for this person they will see it as weakness and exploit me" and replace with the truth – "clothing myself with compassion is a Christ like attribute and opens the door to healing").

4. **Walk with God** and allow Him to work through you. We can more fully appropriate the amazing power of God in our lives when we have dealt with those things that have broken down our intimacy with Him, those lies and wounds that have held us back from being who we truly are.
5. **Take a step of faith** and implement the change God shows you in your relationships.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What impacted you most from the message?
2. Share an example of when you have seen the modern-day rules of relationships being displayed?
3. Share some personal ways in which relating differently in relationships has helped change the culture of where those relationships took place (ie. work, uni, home).
4. Is your life in Christ 'good news' for those around you? If you could ask Jesus for one thing that resembled His life for you to live out now, what would that be? (healing, compassion, miracles, patience, greater capacity to love). All of those things are available in Christ – break into pairs and pray that the Holy Spirit would release that gift or character quality in and through your prayer partner's life.
5. Work through the practical steps above.
6. Identify a situation where God is asking you to relate differently from our cultural norms. Ask God "What do you want me to do differently to allow your light to shine?" Share this with someone else.