

Christ In The Workplace

Colossians 3:22-4:1

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I'm going to read the text, and you follow with me in your Bible, and then we'll break it down verse by verse.

Beginning in Colossians 3:22, Paul speaks to servants, or slaves, and says, "...obey in all things your masters according to the flesh..."—that is, "your human masters"—"...not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever you do, do it with all your heart, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons." That's implying no respect of persons with God. "Masters, give unto your servants..."—or "slaves" or "bond slaves," actually—"...that which is just and equal, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."

Now we looked together the last three times at Christ in the home. We saw, beginning in verse 18, that wives were to be subject unto their husbands, "as it is fit in the Lord." Then we saw that husbands, verse 19, are to "love their wives, and be not bitter against them." Verse 20, children are to "obey their parents in all things," for it "is well pleasing unto the Lord." Then "fathers..."—or "parents"—"...are not to provoke their "children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

So it's only natural, now, that we move to slaves and masters; not implying that women or children are slaves, but implying that slaves were part of the homes at that time. They were, many times, domestic slaves, many times viewed as family and were part of the home, so Paul moves right into this.

Also, I want to make the point that many of the first Christians were slaves. About 50% of the Roman world were slaves; that's about 60 million people were slaves in the Roman empire. So slavery was a very common thing. I'll talk more about slavery in the Bible in a moment.

I believe Jesus transforms not only our hearts and our homes but also the workplace. For an overwhelming majority of Americans today, work is dull and meaningless. Years ago there was a book written by Patterson and Kim. It's title was *The Day America Told the Truth*. It tells us in the book that "Only one tenth of American workers are satisfied with their jobs. Only one in four employees gives his or her best effort on the job." I heard of one employee of a large company who was asked, "How many people work in your office?" and his reply was, "About half of them." Just as marriage today is in trouble, so the workforce is in trouble.

I believe that the home is the building block of society. If you have a home based on God's Word, then it will spill over into the culture around you, and it will be for our good and for God's glory. So Jesus transforms our attitude toward our daily work or the daily grind. Christians can live above the daily grind. They can find purpose and meaning in their jobs.

Before we get into our text today, let me give you one verse that sets the theme for wives, husbands, children, parents, servants and masters. Colossians 3:17 says, "...whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."—and as you're doing it—"...giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."

This is the key to Christ in the workplace. "Whatever you do in word or deed" covers everything. Whatever our attitudes, actions and the words we speak, "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," and we want it to bring glory and honor to Him as we are on the job. So that's the key to remembering to bring Christ into the workplace.

Now our text speaks to two groups. In verse 22, he speaks to "servants," or "slaves" would be a better translation, and then in chapter 4, verse 1, he speaks to "masters" or "slave owners." We will make the application to employees and employers.

First I want to address head on—and this is not exhaustive, and I'm sure there will be some questions raised that I don't answer—the issue of the Bible and slavery. A lot of critics attack the Bible saying that the Bible condones slavery, God told people to have slaves, why doesn't the Bible condemn slavery or the Bible encourages masters to beat their slaves—that it's okay. So they say that the Bible is an immoral book and can't be trusted because of what it has to say about slavery.

So here are a couple of things to remember. Slavery in the Bible days was far different than slavery in our modern times. When we think of slavery, we think of it being based on race; we think of the white man enslaving the black man, taking ships to Africa and taking them captive, chaining them up, bringing them back to America and making them slaves. But we need to remember that when the Bible was written—both the Old and the New Testament—slavery was based on economics and not on race.

The Bible does very clearly condemn slavery. In Deuteronomy 15 and Exodus 21, the Bible condemns "men stealing." That's what we were doing in Africa; we were "men stealing." The Bible condemns that. It also condemns beating a slave until he dies. If a slave did something wrong, there would be punishment. Many cultures have corporal punishment for things that are done wrong. But it said that if a master kills his slave, that master would actually be guilty of murder and should be put to death, which was unheard of outside of the revelation of God's Word.

So slavery was very different in the Roman Empire. Many slaves were doctors. It is believed that Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, possibly was a slave to Theophilus, who was Luke's master. Lawyers were slaves, and slaves were part of the household. Even some politicians were slaves.

You became a slave in several ways. Number one, you became a slave if you were born to slaves. You were owned by your master. Also—and this became quite common—if you ran into financial difficulty. You couldn't go to the bank and get a loan. You couldn't borrow money from

the Bank of America. You had to actually sell yourself as a slave to save your family. So for economic reasons, sometimes people would become slaves, because it would mean a roof over them, food and bed, their family would be taken care of and because many masters saw their slaves were valuable, they would take good care of them.

Also, in the Old Testament, when God spoke to the nation of Israel about slavery, He said you could only have a slave for six years. In the seventh year, that slave was to be released and set free and given some money, some property, some goats and cows, some of your herd and you're to take care of the slaves. A lot of the critics of the Bible miss this altogether.

Secondly, I would say that the Bible doesn't prohibit slavery, but neither does it condone it. The Bible just records the conditions that existed at that time. But God gives principles in His Word that eliminated slavery in the world. It destroyed the institution of slavery, because the Bible says that we are all created equal in God's eyes. The Bible says that as Christians, there is "neither bond nor free, neither male nor female"; we are all one in Jesus Christ. God doesn't love men more than women or women more than men. God doesn't love white people more than black people. It's not a racial thing. We're all brothers and sisters in Christ, and the ground is level at the foot of the Cross. There is no distinction.

When you come to church, there are no class divisions. Neither did they have them in the first century. Some of the first Christians saved were slaves, they would go to church with their masters and in church, they were one in Jesus Christ. Christianity is not only elevating to women and children, but to slaves as well.

Thirdly, I would say the Bible points to a Savior and changes men's hearts. The Bible is not a book about the culture; it is a book about the Savior. As long as there are sinful men in the world, you're going to have them enslaving others. There are a lot of different forms of slavery in our modern world. The reason is the heart of man. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. It's not necessarily laws, which I think are great, that will solve the problem. We should pass laws that people be free, and you can't enslave somebody. But the problem is men's hearts. God comes to change men's hearts. Christianity reforms society from the inside out. In Christ, we're all one.

Fourthly, I would say that it was Christianity that transformed the institution of slavery. In the New Testament is the letter of Philemon. Philemon was a slave owner. Philemon was from Colosse, to which this book of Colossians was written. He had a slave named Onesimus, who wasn't a Christian. Onesimus ran away and became a fugitive. He went to Rome to hide. Paul was in Rome, and Onesimus met him. What a coincidence. I imagine Paul was outside his hired house, in chains, between two Roman soldiers. This slave, who ran away from his master, was walking by and saw a crowd was gathered around Paul as he was preaching, and he listened very carefully to the words the Apostle had to say. He saw the joy on Paul's face and the light and glory of God, and Paul talked of being in bondage to sin and being a slave to sin and how Jesus Christ can forgive our sins and set us free. I picture Onesimus kneeling before Paul and Paul leading him in a prayer of repentance. He was born again and he came to

know Jesus Christ. He was now “free indeed.” The Bible says, “If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.”

I think eventually Onesimus said, “Paul I have something to tell you.”

“What’s that?”

“I’m a fugitive. I ran away from my master, Philemon, in Colosse, and I tried to get lost in Rome, but I was found of the Lord. I need to let you know that I’m a fugitive.”

Paul must have thought, Wow! What a coincidence. I know Philemon. He’s one of my converts, and I just so happen to be writing a letter to the church at Colosse. I’ll write another one to Philemon. So Paul wrote that little, one-chapter letter or epistle to Philemon. I believe that Onesimus was one of the individuals who carried Colossians and the letter to Philemon back to the city of Colosse. And I can imagine when Onesimus got back to his master, Philemon, he would have said, “Before you get upset with me, read this letter. I met Paul and everything’s cool.”

Philemon opens the letter and begins to read that it was from Paul, who had met Onesimus, who got saved, and Paul wanted Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother. He’s no longer a slave but a brother in Christ. Paul asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus, and if Onesimus owes anything to Philemon, Paul would pay it. Paul said, “Put it on my account; I’ll take care of it.” Christianity changes men’s hearts. And changing men’s hearts changed the institution of slavery. How elevating and liberating is Christ in our culture.

Now let’s look at what happens when Christ goes to work with us. It’s interesting that this sermon fell on Labor Day weekend. Monday you get the day off, but you go back to work on Tuesday. First of all, we have God’s Word to servants or employees. Many of us are employed by others, and we need to know what God wants of us on the job.

The first is the command in verse 22. “Servants...”—or “slaves” or “employees”—“...obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.” Now here’s the principle, and it’s really simple: When you go to work, do what your boss tells you to do. Don’t whine, don’t complain, don’t gripe, don’t debate. Just be obedient. It’s the same phrase regarding children in verse 20; “obey your parents in all things.” Now we have chapter 3, verse 22, where we have, “Servants, obey in all things your masters.” The very same Greek words used for children are now used for servants, or we would apply it to employees. This is in what’s called the present active imperative. In the Greek, it’s a command, and it’s in the present tense. That means that it’s ongoing and continual.

There are five features of an employee’s obedience on the job. First, it covers everything. Notice the phrase “all things.” “Obey in all things.” Now, of course, human authority is limited. So if your boss asks you to lie, steal or to cheat or to fudge on your reports, you have to “obey God rather than man.” I know it’s difficult working out there in the heathen world, and your boss may ask you to do things that are unethical. But as a Christian, you go by the beat of a different

drum; you have a conscience toward God or a fear of God. You want to be obedient to God. You say, "Well, I would lose my job if I don't do that." Then lose your job. (Some of you are not sure about that.)

You say, "Well, that's easy for you to say; you're a pastor." Yah, but I haven't always been a pastor. I had to do a lot of stinkin', dirty, slimy, nasty jobs. When I was young and just getting started in the ministry, I worked for a temporary placement employer, and they would send me every day out on some horrible, horrible, horrible jobs. I'm still a little messed up today because of it. I'm kidding. But it's not like what I've ever done is turn Bible pages my whole life. I know what it's like to be out there in the world and listen to their language. It's like, "Lord, please help me." But I believe that that's your mission field. That's your ministry. We're going to see that all work for the Christian is sacred, not secular; we're serving the Lord.

So the first thing to remember is that we "obey in all things," and secondly, that we do it "not with eyeservice, as menpleasers." Notice that in verse 22. It means that you don't just work when the boss is there. You don't just work when the boss is looking. I remember when I was in elementary school and the teacher would leave the classroom. Some of you know what I'm talking about; right? You would freak out just because the teacher wasn't there. Someone would always keep watch. "Teacher's coming! Everyone back in your seats!" You would just terrorize the classroom when the teacher was gone. But a lot of people go to work, and if the boss isn't there, then when "The cat's away, the mice will play." So we need to be busy working, because we know the Lord is watching.

I was employed at a place one time, and we found out that the boss was actually hiding in the rafters. Seriously. I didn't want to look up, because I didn't want him to know that I knew he was there. I was working down below, and he was spying on us to make sure we were doing our jobs. It was before cameras, I guess. He had to hide in the rafters. But we knew he was up there, so we were workin' away, whistlin' and doin' good. Then the boss leaves and it's, "Praise God. He's not here anymore." So we need to work as to the Lord and "not with eyeservice, as menpleasers."

Thirdly, we should work "in singleness of heart," fearing God. There is a lot of instruction in that 22nd verse. "Singleness of heart" is the opposite of hypocrisy or duplicity or double-dealing or phoniness. Having a single heart means that you're sincere. The word "single" there is actually from the words "pure heart." So you're doing it out of a genuine heart and a fear of God. I think of Joseph, who was sold as a slave by his brothers, and he worked for Potiphar in Egypt. But God blessed him and God elevated him, because he did it as to the Lord.

Fourthly, your work should not only be obedient "in all things...not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but in singleness of heart," but it should be enthusiastic. Verse 23 says, "And whatsoever you do, do it heartily," as the King James translation says, or "do it with all your heart." That word "heartily" in the Greek literally means "out of soul." You say, "Wait a minute, Pastor. I've been with you all this time, but you don't know what I do. I got a really stinkin' job with a really stinkin' boss—it's really lousy—and you're tellin' me that I have to do it from my

heart?" That's what the Bible says. You do it out of your soul. In Romans 12:11, the Living Bible's paraphrase says we should "Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically." In other words, it's not to be half-hearted.

Not only was Jesus the Savior of the world, but He was a carpenter. I believe He had calluses. I believe that when Jesus worked in the carpenter shop, He made the best yokes of anyone around. He paid attention to every detail. As a matter of fact, He actually said, "My yoke is easy." In the Greek, that means that "My yoke fits." That was on His business card: "Jesus, of Nazareth, carpenter. My yokes fit." Pretty cool; huh? When you went to Jesus for a yoke, you knew it was going to be top notch. Jesus was hard working.

By the way, when God became a man in the incarnation, it was to become a carpenter. He sanctifies manual labor. Never despise manual labor. There is no class distinction in God's economy. The Son of God was a hard-working man, and we should honor that. What an awesome thing that is.

Lastly, and fifthly, in verse 23, when you work, it should be "as to the Lord, and not unto men." If your eyes are on the Lord, work will be a joy and a blessing. If your eyes are on man, it will be a drudge. We need to keep that perspective. I sometimes complain if I have to pick up other people's trash. "Can't they put this stuff in the trash can? What's wrong with these people? They're so messy!" And then the Lord speaks to me through a message like this. You know that God actually speaks to me through my own sermons? "Whatever you have to do. If you have to pick up a cigarette butt." I hate picking up cigarette butts. Why do I have to pick them up? "Whatsoever you do, do it as unto the Lord." It'll make all the difference in the world. "Lord, I'm serving You. I'm beautifying Your place, and I'm doing it with a heart that is wanting to honor You and glorify You."

So the point is that for the Christian, all work is sacred; not secular. When I left my secular job to go into a sacred job, the ministry, full time, I didn't stop being a worker or minister—I was a minister of the Gospel already. It doesn't matter what your job is; it's possible for a wife to clean her house as though Jesus was coming over. You say, "Well, it's not Jesus; it's just my husband." Make believe it's Jesus. When you cook a meal, you're cooking it for Jesus. If you're waiting on patients as a nurse or as a doctor, you're waiting on Jesus. If you're serving somebody in retail in a store, you're serving Jesus. Do everything as though you're doing it as unto the Lord. If you're digging ditches, you're digging them for Jesus. If you're swinging a hammer, if you're selling cars—I know this is going to be hard. If you're a used-car salesman, we're going to lay hands on you after service—you do it as unto the Lord; you're selling that car to Jesus. Would you sell that car to Jesus? Would you charge him that much for that car? Sorry. All that we do, we do it as unto the Lord, and we're not doing it as unto men.

I read a poem years ago and I love it. It says

Father, where shall I work today?

And my love flowed warm and free.

Then He pointed me out a tiny spot

And said, "Tend that for Me."

I answered quickly, "Oh, not that!"

Why no one would ever see,

No matter how well my work was done.

Not that little place for me.

And the word He spoke, it was not stern;

He answered tenderly.

"Ah, little one, search that heart of thine.

Art thou working for them or for Me?

Nazareth was a little place, and so was Galilee.

When God came from heaven to earth, He grew up in Nazareth, a despised town in a despised place among despised people, and He had a humble job in a carpenter's shop.

But notice that Paul gives the reason why slaves, or employees, should obey their masters in verses 24-25. He says, "...knowing that of the Lord, you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ. But know that he who doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons."

Now, there are two things here. God will reward you; that you are faithfully serving him in whatever profession or career or job He has placed you in. Is your place a small place? Tend it with care. He placed you there. Is your place a large place? Tend it with care. He placed you there. Whatever your place is, it's not yours alone, but His. He placed you there. Don't forget that. You're where you are because God placed you there. And you're there to serve the Lord. Let your light shine for Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine, verse 24, when these slaves, who received no inheritance under Roman laws, read that they were serving the Lord and would get an inheritance? Imagine what joy would have filled their hearts. They had no earthly treasure or monetary things. They didn't own property or land or get paid. They knew one day they were going to be with the Lord, and they were going to be rewarded for their faithful service.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "...my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always

abounding in the work of the Lord...”—Why?—“...forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” You serve the Lord Christ. It’s so important to remember to keep the Lord in view. I pointed this out a few weeks ago that the Lord is mentioned in chapter 3, verse 17; in verse 18, “...as it is fit in the Lord”; in verse 20, “...pleasing unto the Lord”; in verse 23, “...whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord”; and in verse 24, “...knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ.” So whatever we do, always keep Jesus in view. Whatever we are called to do, keep Jesus always in view. You’re not doing it for men, but you’re doing it unto and for the Lord.

Lastly, notice in verse 25 that God will judge. “But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons.” How shall we interpret verse 25? You say, “Well, why do you even ask that?” I ask that because there are two possibilities. It’s possible that Paul is saying to the servant or to the slave that if you don’t do what’s right, you’re going to answer to God. And that’s true. But it’s also possible that he’s saying to the slaves that if a master mistreats them—because he transitions right into masters and slaves—God will take care of the master. “‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ sayeth the Lord.”

It’s common knowledge that many times slaves would become angry and rebel against their masters. They might hurt them or kill them or come against them and attack them. The Bible actually tells slaves in the New Testament in Titus 2:9-10 that they are to “adorn the doctrine of God, that His doctrine and His name be not blasphemed.”

The same thing holds true of us on the job. If your boss knows you’re a Christian, then live like a Christian on the job. Don’t defame the name of the Lord by not being a good worker. Christians should be the most conscientious, diligent, punctual, on-time, best workers than anyone else. All for the glory of God.

What he’s saying in verse 25 is that God will adjudicate all wrongs. That is a universal principle that we can hold onto. If you’ve been wronged, God will take care of it. God will judge. “‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ sayeth the Lord.” You want to get back at your boss, or you want to get back at your employee—“That’s not right; I wanna get ‘em!” God says, “‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ sayeth the Lord.”

Now moving into chapter 4:1 we have God’s Word to masters. Just one verse. “Masters, give...”—The word “give” there indicates on a daily basis or ongoing, continually—“...unto your servants...”—or “your slaves” or, in this case, “your employees”—“...that which is just and equal...”—So two things you’re supposed to do: You’re supposed to give what is just and what is equal, and the reason is—“...knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.”

As with husbands and wives, parents and children, so it is with masters and slaves; you have a corresponding responsibility. It’s reciprocal. If a wife is to submit, a husband is to love. If children are to obey, parents are not to provoke. If a slave is to obey his master, then the masters are to give to their slaves that which is just and equal. The Bible is a very balanced book. It elevates women, it elevates children and it elevates the slave and manual labor. Some

have called Colossians 4:1 the “managerial golden rule.” I like that.

In the Roman world, slaves had no rights. When a slave read that he would get a reward, he would have been so excited. When a master read in verse 1 that he would have to give a slave what is just and equal, he would have been blown away. “What?! You want me to be fair with my slaves?!” God says, “Yes. I want you to give them what is just and equal.”

Verse 1, again, is a command or imperative in the present tense. It's not an option; it's a command. It's ongoing and continual that you be just, which is right, and fair. Do right by them. Do justly. Be equal toward them.

Some believe that Paul was inferring that masters set their slaves free. That's possible. At least he was saying, “Treat them as God treats you. Treat them as spiritual brothers in Christ.” So if you have employees, how does God treat you? Is God kind toward you? Be kind toward them. Does God provide for you? Then you provide for them. Does God take care of you? Then you take care of them. Is God patient? Then you be patient. Does God forgive you? Then you forgive them. However God treats you is how you should treat others. That's the golden rule.

Notice the reason for this command in verse 1: “...knowing that ye also have a Master...”—Where?—“...in heaven.” So, again, our thoughts are turned where? Toward God. This whole passage, beginning back in chapter 3, verse 18, is all about the Lord. Jesus changes everything. He comes into our hearts. He comes into our homes. He comes into our workplaces. When you go back to work this week, take Jesus with you. Keep Him always in view. Do what you do as unto the Lord and not unto men. Then the Lord will bless you, and the Lord will reward you.

Now this is not a carte blanche; that if you do these things you'll prosper on your job. You might be persecuted. Many of the early Christians were persecuted, because they stood for truth. I've known Christian men on the construction site who worked hard, and the non-Christian guys wanted to take beer breaks, hang out and not work so hard. They actually got really upset with the Christians, because they made them look bad. “Your work's done, and our isn't. Slow down, man! Don't work so hard; you're making us look bad.” Or you may have a boss who tells you to lie or to be deceitful. You may be persecuted or even fired from your job, but you need to remember that you're serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the first thing you need to do is to make sure Jesus is in your heart. He's not going to be in your marriage, in your work or in your home if He's not in your heart. You need to understand that. You're not a Christian because you come to church. You're not a Christian because you listen to a sermon. You're not a Christian because you were born in America. You're not a Christian because you believe there's a God out there.

You become a Christian when you realize that Jesus Christ died on the Cross for your sins and when you realize you are a sinner and you're going to hell. If I don't turn from my sins and trust Jesus as my Savior, I will perish. The Bible says you need to repent and believe in Jesus

Christ. That means you change your mind about your sin, you turn around and you have to trust Jesus Christ to save you. You have to invite Jesus Christ to come into your heart and forgive your sins.

So if you haven't trusted Jesus Christ, all of this teaching on marriage, parenting and the job won't help you at all, because Christ is not living in your heart. Either Jesus is in your heart, or He's not. Either you're a Christian, or you're not. Either you've been born again, or you haven't been born again. Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Before I finish this miniseries in Colossians in the next couple of weeks, I want to make sure that if you haven't trusted Jesus Christ—you haven't given Him your heart, you haven't repented of your sins, you haven't received Christ as your Lord and Savior and you haven't invited Him to come into your heart and forgive your sins—then I want to give you an opportunity to do that. You can leave here today knowing that your sins are forgiven; that if you died today, you would go to heaven. Then you will take Christ back to your home and into your marriage and to your work this week. He'll make everything brand new. The Bible says, "If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things pass away, and all things become new." So if you haven't given your heart to Jesus Christ, I want to give you an opportunity to do that right now, right here, and to be forgiven and have the hope of heaven.

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.