

Christ In The Workplace

Colossians 3:22-4:1

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Let's read the text beginning in Colossians 3:22. Paul says, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart,"—I love that—"fearing God:"—notice that we do what we do on the job, we do with a reverence or fear for God—"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men,"—that's another important principle we'll come back to—"Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. 1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."

We've looked together on Wednesday nights at the study of Christ in the home, and we looked at Christ transforms our hearts and transforms our homes. Back up with me to just peek at it real quick, we have wives in the home who submit themselves to their husbands as to the Lord, verse 18; then we have husbands, verse 19, who actually love their wives, and they are not bitter toward them; and we have children, verse 20, who "obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord;" and we have fathers or parents, "provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." We looked at Ephesians where they, " . . .bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." If you missed those studies on the home, I encourage you to go back and to listen to them.

Not only does Jesus transform our hearts and our homes, but Jesus also transforms our workplace. There's an overwhelming majority of people that when they go to work it's dull, boring, and meaningless. Years ago we used to have a bumper sticker out (I didn't have one on my car, obviously), it said, "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go." Have you ever seen that? Do you remember that one? I always saw that and thought, What a sad motive for work—If I wasn't in debt I wouldn't go to work, you know, "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go." Well, Christ can transform our work ethic. He can give us a Christ-centered work ethic.

Every one of us is most likely either, if not now going to be, an employee or an employer—you're either working for someone or someone's working for you—so we need to understand what the Bible has to say about Christ in the workplace. Patterson and Kim in their book, *The Day America Told The Truth*, they said that only one-tenth of American workers are satisfied with their jobs, and that only one in four employees give his or her best effort on the job. One employee was asked in a large company, "How many worked in his office?" He said, "About half of them." If you're in the workplace, you know that many times people will try to do all they can to get paid but not work, (right?) to just goof off, get the check, and go home.

As Christians, we're to have a different work ethic and attitude toward our job. Jesus can transform our attitude toward our daily work. He can give us purpose and meaning, and the overarching key to both the home and to the workplace is back in verse 17. Back up real quick,

peek at it, where Paul says, “And whatsoever ye do,”—now that phrase “whatsoever ye do,” means literally whatsoever you do. Isn’t that profound? So, “whatsoever ye do . . . do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,”—that means you do it for His sake and for His glory—“giving thanks to God,”—you’re thankful—“and the Father by him.” Verse 17 is just a great overarching rule or principle on how we should live our lives—doing it for the name of Christ, giving glory to Him.

In our text, as you probably notice, Paul speaks to two groups: he speaks to servants, which are actually referenced to slaves, verses 22-25; and then he speaks to masters or slave owners, Colossians 4:1. You might be saying, “Well, how in the world does that relate to us today, slaves and masters?” And there’s a lot of people upset with the thought that, Hey, the Bible promotes slavery and encourages slavery, which I don’t believe is true. I’m going to address that in just a moment, but the application to these verses would be employees and employers. The principles stay the same. We may not be dealing with slaves and slave owners, but the application is to employees and employers, so we will make an application that way.

Before I do that and begin to unpack these verses to the servants and to the masters, let me say a few things about the Bible and the subject of slavery. First, slavery in Bible days was actually different from slavery in our modern times. There were some similarities in some cases, some cultures, but it was more involved in commerce and economics than it was race. It wasn’t a racial thing. When we hear the word “slave” today in America, immediately our minds go to the African slave trade where white Europeans were bringing Africans from the continent of Africa—which, by the way, were being sold to them by Africans in Africa, I just thought I’d throw that in there—to America. That doesn’t justify it. It doesn’t mean it’s right.

Any Christian, even at the time, that thought that slave trade and slave owning was okay certainly did not understand his Bible, and certainly did not understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. It wasn’t based on race in the Bible days, and it wasn’t based on the African slave trade; it was commerce. Half the Roman empire were slaves. One of the reasons it’s believed that Paul did not come out and directly condemn slavery was because the whole culture would’ve collapsed. So, what God chose to do was rather change men’s hearts, and changing men’s hearts changed their attitude toward this slave trade. The ancient world of the Bible days, slaves were doctors, they were lawyers, they were part of the household. They were, many times, treated as family members. Some believed that actually Luke, who wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, was a slave owned by Theophilus, and that’s a possibility. So, they were real high-ranking, very many officials and well-educated people that many times were slaves.

In the ancient world of the Bible you became a slave because you were either taken captive in war or for economic reasons, you couldn’t pay a debt and you had to sell yourself as a slave. In the Bible, it says that the true children of Israel could only have a slave for seven years and then had to release them and let them go. You couldn’t beat them, you couldn’t kill them, so it was a different kind of slavery from our modern world.

Secondly, let me make this point, the Bible doesn't condemn it, but neither does it condone it. The Bible may not directly condemn it, it does condemn kidnapping and stealing people, but it doesn't condone it either, and God gives guidelines for it. Write down, for more study on your own, Deuteronomy 15 and Exodus 21. There are real restrictive laws that a master could not mistreat his slave, could not kill his slave, and not abuse his slave, but the guidelines God gave to govern it are there in Deuteronomy 15 and Exodus 21.

Thirdly, the Bible points to a Savior who came to change men's hearts. The Bible is about the gospel. It's about God sending His Son to die on the cross to forgive our sins and to give us new hearts and new lives, and the world was changed by changing men's hearts. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. The reason why this is still an issue in our modern world today is because men are sinful, but the solution to man's sin is Jesus Christ who's the Savior. The Bible says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." So, in Christ there is a new bond of love.

Write down Galatians 3:28. It says, ". . . there is neither bond nor free . . . male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." As Christians—in the church, in our standing and relationship to God—we are all one. I'm so glad that as we gather to worship here at Revival Christian Fellowship it's not an issue of ethnicity or gender, it's an issue of our relationship to Christ. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we're all one in Christ in the family of God. We have an equal standing before God.

Let me say this, fourth and lastly, about slavery, it was Christianity that transformed the institution of slavery. They were Christians leading the way who were the main abolitionists and you need to read the stories in history of that. It's marvelous. Christians were leading the way, and it was the introduction of Christianity into the world that eventually brought a great reduction, if not in some cases annihilation, of slave ownership.

It's interesting that we have a New Testament book in our Bible called Philemon. Have you ever read the little book of Philemon, one chapter? Philemon was a man who owned a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus ran away from his master, Philemon. Do you know where he ran to? Rome. When he got to Rome, and I'm just preaching with a little imagination here, he was walking the streets of Rome and saw a man, at that time didn't know who it was, it was Paul the apostle who was in chains. There was a crowd gathered around him. He was under arrest, and he thought, Well, there's another man in chains, and began to listen to him.

He heard the gospel of Jesus Christ by Paul's preaching, saw the love, saw the joy of Christ in his life, and Onesimus, the runaway slave, accepted Christ in Rome and became a Christian. He ran away from Colossae by...it's interesting that Philemon was in Colossae, to Rome to get lost and instead he was found—the lost was found. He's there with Paul and tells Paul, "Well, Paul, I have to let you know that I'm a fugitive. I ran away from my master Philemon in Colossae, and I'm a fugitive. Now, what do I do? I'm a Christian." Guess what Paul said. He said, "What a coincidence. I know Philemon. He's one of my converts, so I'll write a letter with Colossae to the Colossians," this one we're reading, "you can carry it back to your master, and

I'll encourage him to receive you as a brother in Christ. And, that if you owe him anything, I'll ask him to put it to my account because he owes me his very life as I led him to Christ."

Aren't the ways of God marvelous? Isn't it cool the Bible says, " . . . all things work together for good to them that love God"? So he runs away from his master, gets saved in Rome under Paul's ministry, goes back carrying this letter to Colossae, and he's encouraged to be received by Philemon as a brother in Christ, no longer a slave. Paul's words there are elevating and liberating both in the book of Philemon and here in this epistle to the Colossians.

Let's look at them and learn what happens when Christ comes into the workplace. There are two sections. The first is God's Word to servants, which we will apply to employees, verses 22-25. The first thing you need to know is that there's a command. Look at verse 22, "Servants,"—or employees—"obey in all things your masters according to the flesh;"—your human masters—"not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." So, servants are to be obedient in all things.

The same word "obey" found in verse 20 for, "Children, obey your parents," is the same word found here in verse 22 for, "Servants, obey . . . your masters." This is employees obey your employers. It's in the present active imperative, that means it's not an option, it's commanded you. If you are employed and you go to work and your boss tells you to do something, you, as a general rule, are to be obedient to what they tell you. The fact that it's in the present tense means continually, ongoingly practice obedience on the job.

There are five features of the employee's obedience, and he breaks it down for us. Let's look at them. First of all, it covers, " . . . all things," verse 22, "obey in all things." This does not include sinful things. If you're a Christian, working for a non-Christian boss, and he tells you to fudge on your reports—to lie, steal, cheat, to be deceptive—you must obey God rather than man, even if it means losing your job. Amen? Some of you say, (in a weak, almost whisper of a voice) "Amen. I'll think about it."

People come to me all the time, "John, I'm working for this guy and he wants me to lie, he wants me to steal, wants me to cheat people out of things. What do I do?" "Well, you're a Christian. You can't do that." "Well, I'll lose my job." "Lose your job. You don't think God can take care of you? You don't think God can provide? Isn't it more important to obey God rather than man? And, you're going to lose your witness on the job. We're to be a good witness for Christ on the job," so we need to do it in that attitude of obeying in all things, unless it's something that's immoral or illegal or unscriptural. But, if it's just an unpleasant job, and you don't want to do it, then that's not the right heart or attitude.

Notice, secondly, that it's not to be done, " . . . with eyeservice, as menpleasers." I love that in the King James translation which means only when the boss is looking. It just means to be obedient even when he's not there. Remember when some of us were in elementary school and the teacher would leave the classroom? You don't remember that? I can't believe you're not freaking out. And everyone would go ballistic, and you'd have someone watch the door to

see if the teacher's coming. You would just run around the room doing bizarre stuff—spit wads, throwing books, jumping on your desk. You say, "Not me, Pastor Miller, I was a good student."

It's kind of like that in the workplace, you know, when the cat's gone...the mice will play when the cat's not there. So, you need to be doing it as to the Lord, we're going to see, not as unto men; not as "menpleasers," which means only when your boss is there looking or watching or spying on you. Today with all the cameras that we have, it's very hard not to be diligent to do your job, but we do it as unto the Lord.

The third aspect about it, it should be done, " . . . in singleness of heart," verse 22, "fearing God." Notice those two qualities of a Christian's work, " . . . singleness of heart, fearing God,"—with a fear for God. "Singleness of heart" is the opposite of hypocrisy and duplicity and double-dealing. It means that we have integrity and that we have sincerity, so that means that our hearts are focused on being obedient to God. Notice the little phrase, "fearing God." Don't miss that in that verse. " . . . singleness of heart,"—that means sincerity of heart, we do it as—"fearing God." "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

I love the story of Joseph who was sold as a slave—there we go—to Egypt. He was hired by Potiphar, then he went to prison. He did everything right and still suffered. He was exalted to second to Pharaoh, but all through Joseph's illustrious career, every time Joseph opened his mouth in Scripture, if you do a study of the life of Joseph, every time he speaks on the pages of Scripture, he mentions God. He always mentions God, so he was a God-fearing man. The Lord was with Joseph because Joseph feared the Lord, and God blessed him even in those difficult situations in Egypt and exalted him to second unto Pharaoh. We need to have a fear of God.

Fourthly, notice that our obedience should be, and this is the challenge, enthusiastic. Look at verse 23, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily,"—or with your whole heart, so do it with all your heart. That phrase "heartily," or with all your heart, literally actually means out of soul. You say, "Well, wait a minute, Pastor John, you just don't know what kind of a dirty, stinky, rotten, lousy job I have." By the way, I haven't always been a pastor. I started pastoring very young, but before that I did a lot of dirty, stinking, hard, difficult jobs. I did a lot of grunt labor in construction sites, and it was hard and difficult. But when you're a Christian, you do it as unto the Lord enthusiastically, out of your soul, with all of your heart, not half-hearted.

Write down Romans 12:11. Listen to what it says. Paul says, "Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically." That's the Living Bible Translation, "Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically." You should never be accused as a Christian of being lazy, and you should be enthusiastic as you work conscientiously as unto the Lord. The idea there is that we don't do it with a half heart, we do it wholeheartedly.

Remember Jesus was a carpenter, right? Jesus probably worked hard in the carpenter shop, and I'm sure that many times Jesus was told by his dad, Joseph, "Get a broom and sweep up all of the debris and wood shavings in the carpenter's shop." Can you imagine Jesus saying,

"No, I don't want to." Can you imagine having the Son of God as your child? Put that on your chariot bumper sticker, "My Child is the Son of God." It's pretty amazing. I believe that when Jesus made a yoke for an ox, it was perfect. He did it very well. He probably had on his business cards, "My Yoke is easy, My burdens are light." Do you know what the phrase, by the way, " . . . my yoke is easy," is in the Greek? It means fits, so His business card maybe read, "My yokes fit." I love that.

Jesus, being the Son of God incarnate—listen to me—forever sanctified manual labor. Do you know that Christianity brought that to the world? Christianity elevate and sanctifies manual labor. In many cultures of the world manual labor was despised and looked down upon. Fifty percent of Roman people were slaves, several million of them, and they were despised and looked down upon and they were owned like chattel by their masters. Christianity transformed the world. If we didn't have Christianity in the world, we would live in a very, very dark, very evil, very cruel world.

Remember that even women who were told to submit to their husbands or have husbands who were told to love their wives; parents, kids are to be obedient to, but parents, "provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." All these commands are reciprocal, they're balanced out. If wives submit, husbands love; If children obey, parents don't provoke; if slaves obey their masters, masters (we'll get there in Colossians 4:1) are to be kind and gentle and helpful and not be harsh toward their slaves.

Lastly, fifthly, notice that their obedience should be, " . . . as to the Lord, and not unto men," verse 23. It should be, " . . . as to the Lord, and not unto men." For the Christian all labor is sacred not secular. You might say, "Well, I have a secular job. I don't work at a church. I'm not in full-time Christian ministry." Every one of us as believers are full-time ministers. Amen? It doesn't matter what you do. If you're digging ditches, you do it to the glory of God. If you're washing dishes, you do it to the glory of God. If you're swinging a hammer, you do it to the glory of God. If you're cooking food, you do it to the glory of God. If you're a nurse taking care of patients, you do it to the glory of God. If you're a used car salesman...we'll pray for you after church. You do it to the glory of God. And when you ask yourself, "Would I sell this car for that much if it were Jesus buying the car?" I don't use that when I go to buy a car, either. Whatever you do, it's not secular, it's sacred. Again, the incarnation and the manual labor of the Son of God sanctifies that and elevates that. It's a marvelous, marvelous truth.

Write down this text. I want to read it to you, 1 Timothy 6:1-2. Paul says, "Let as many servants,"—or slaves—"as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." So, you serve the Lord on the job so that Christ's name and doctrine be not blasphemed. Then he says, "And they that have believing masters,"—so you're working for a Christian—"let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort." Remember that.

Years ago I ran into this poem that I've always loved. Listen to it. It goes like this:

Father, where shall I work today?

And my love flowed free and warm.

Then He pointed me out a tiny spot,

And said, "Tend that for me."

I answered quickly, "Oh, no, 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 me tenderly,

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

Art thou working for them or Me?

Nazareth was a little place,

And so was Galilee."

I love that. Jesus came and sanctified manual labor, and we should be honoring Him as we work.

Now, before we close this section, verses 24-25 gives us the reasons for our obedience. This is the rationale or reasons for our obedience. Verse 24, "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." Look at verse 25, "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons," that is, with God.

There are two reasons given in verses 24 and 25 why we as employees should be hard-working, conscientious, and obedient to our employers. The first is God will reward you. Again, this is what elevates this labor—you're doing it as unto the Lord, and you're looking to the Lord to be your rewarder. I love verse 24 where it says, " . . . ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." We will be rewarded.

Now, in the ancient world slaves got no inheritance, unless they became adopted legally as sons and daughters into the family. When they read these words...by the way, I forgot to mention the majority of the first Christians were slaves, but when they gathered together to

fellowship in the church, slaves and masters were on equal footing. A lot of the first Christians were those who were slaves, came to Christ, that's why there's so much instruction for them in the Bible and for masters as well. So, the Lord will reward us if we do it with all those qualities that are mentioned by Paul here in Colossians. They had a promised blessing of which, no doubt, these slaves would be rejoicing and giving thanks to God and praising God and they'd be looking for the reward in heaven.

First Corinthians 15:58 says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." We do it as unto the Lord because we're going to be rewarded from the Lord.

Do you know that God will reward us when we get to heaven based on our faithfulness, not on what we did but how faithful we did what He called us to do? So, if He calls you to what seems to be a menial task in a humble place where no one knows but God, what does it matter? You're going to be rewarded just as much as anyone else, if you do it faithfully as unto the Lord. What a blessing that is.

The key is the Lord! Again, I pointed out to you, I didn't know if you saw it. Go all the way back to verse 17 for just a moment. Notice the phrase, "... in the name of the Lord Jesus;" look at verse 18, "... in the Lord," at the end of the verse; then, look at the end of verse 20, "... unto the Lord;" then, at the end of verse 22, "... fearing God;" look at the statement in verse 23, "... as to the Lord, and not unto men;" verse 24, "... of the Lord," and "... the Lord Christ;" then, we're going to get there in just a second, Colossians 4:1, "... ye have a Master in heaven," who is the Lord. All of it is just permeated by our focus on the Lord and our reward that shall come from the Lord. So, "... be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," because of the Lord we will be receiving our reward, verse 24, "for ye serve the Lord Christ." You are a servant of Jesus Christ.

The second reason, verse 25, is that God will judge. Now, this verse is a little challenging to clearly understand, but he says, "But he that doeth wrong," and the question is, who's the "he"? Is the "he" the slave or the master? And, since we're not sure, it clearly would apply to either one. "But he that doeth wrong," so if the slave does wrong and he's punished by his master, then he got what he should've gotten, and God is just and there will be judgment. On the other hand, if it's equally the master who wrongs the slave, the slave (and this would bring them great comfort) would know that one day the master would have to give an account to God. So, if the master's mistreating the slave, the slave could know one day God will judge and God will be righteous and I can rest in that. He would be understanding it that way.

Now, again, this is a universal principle, God will adjudicate all wrongs. That runs all through the Bible, God will adjudicate all wrongs. If there is no God, then there's no justice, there's no final retribution. For those who do evil, there's no righteous judge who will judge them if there is no God. But God is no respecter of persons, verse 25. I love that. God's judgements are impartial. God doesn't judge impartially, He judges righteously.

Now, one more verse, and it deals with the masters or the employers. If you are the boss, or you're the employer and you have people working under you, Colossians 4:1, "Masters, give unto your servants,"—which is again, slaves—"that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." This is so revolutionary. Christianity revolutionizes the world. This is so amazing. The ancient world couldn't believe these concepts and these principles. So as with husbands and parents, so now masters have a corresponding duty, Colossians 4:1. This command elevates slaves. It has been called the managerial golden rule, Colossians 4:1. In the Roman world slaves had no rights, so as you were a master in the ancient world and you read verse 1, it would absolutely blow your mind.

Notice the command in verse 1, "give unto your servants that which is just and equal." The English Standard Version has, "Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly," so the word "just" means right, and the word "fairly" means that you deal with them graciously. Remember the Roman empire and the cruelty that was there, so this was revolutionary. It was transforming. Just do them right, equal, set them free, perhaps, and many Christian masters gave their slaves freedom, unless they wanted to become a bondsman. They treated them as they would treat their own family, treat them as spiritual brothers. Again, I remind you of Onesimus and Philemon. If you get a chance, tonight when you go home before you turn out the lights and tuck yourself into bed, read that little, short epistle of Philemon. It's only one chapter, it would fit on a postcard, and just meditate on that.

Notice the reason for the command, I love it, verse 1, ". . . knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." Do you see how Jesus changes everything? When the slave gets saved, when the master gets saved, when the employee gets saved and the employers get saved, you have a Master in heaven. You're all wanting to honor and obey God. It's the same thing in the marriage. When a wife wants to submit as unto the Lord, when a husband wants to love his wife as Christ loved the church, when children want to be obedient to their parents because this is fitting as unto the Lord, when parents want to bring their kids up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, the fear of the Lord transforms our hearts, our homes, and our world.

So, employees, employers, you need to follow these instructions. Christ changes everything. Amen? Let's pray.