

“WORKING FOR THE HEAVENLY BOSS”

COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

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INTRODUCTION

How many of you are slaves? Then, why am I preaching on this passage?

In America and most highly civilized countries, slavery has been abolished—those working for employers are not owned by them, although in history some kinds of employment have come close to slavery—such as indentured servants. Still, most agree that this passage about slaves is not irrelevant to us today. The principles here apply to all workers who are under an employer. The motivations here are for them to “give honest, faithful, ungrudging work in return for the pay they receive.” In addition, their work is important to God and has genuine dignity before Him—regardless of its apparent unimportance. For centuries we have spoken about “**the Protestant work ethic.**”

The principles taught in this passage are good for society, good for bosses, good for workers, and honoring to God.

YOUR WORK IS IMPORTANT TO GOD!

Since slaves were considered part of the household, Paul addresses them along with other family members. In the Roman world, slavery was universally acceptable and considered essential to the smooth functioning of civilized society. In the major cities of the empire, about 50% of the people one would see on the streets at any time would be slaves. Even the majority of “professional people” such as doctors and teachers were slaves, along with craftsmen and menial workers. Slaves were considered property and had no real rights. They existed for the comfort, convenience, and pleasure of their owners. One could become a slave through being a prisoner of war, debt, becoming a convict, being kidnapped, being bought, and through birth to an enslaved parent. Now although mainly household slaves of believing masters are in view here, those who work elsewhere as in agriculture and industry are obviously included, as are those who have unbelieving masters. In the new relationship with Christ, the slave could even become a leader in a church and could claim consideration from his Christian master, but he would still be responsible to serve his master faithfully due to his relationship with Christ.

Many are concerned that neither Paul nor any NT author denounced or called for the overthrow of slavery.

- 1) Neither Paul nor any other NT writer ever endorses slavery.
- 2) Their primary duty was to preach the gospel, establish churches, and train believers. They were not social reformers.
- 3) The church was in no position to attack slavery; it was very small—at the beginning—and had no chance of changing Roman policies.
- 4) A frontal attack could have been the doom of Christianity.
- 5) Paul and other Christians laid down the principle of equality in Christ and other Christian teachings that eventually destroyed the institution of slavery. Even in this passage we see allusion to such ideas.
- 6) The fact that Paul even chose to directly address slaves was an attack upon the status quo—such recognition would not be given to them, and addressing them in particular along with others tends to put them on equal grounds with the rest, that they are responsible persons, and that they must have been gathered together with the other believers in order to hear Paul’s address.
- 7) Paul deliberately “relativizes the status of the slave’s master by repeatedly reminding both slave (22, 23, 24) and master (4:1) of the ultimate ‘master’ to whom both are responsible: the Lord Jesus Christ” (M. 308).
- 8) Through the principles Paul taught, “the ill-will dishonesty, and laziness of the slave would be replaced by willing service, integrity, and industry; the cruelty and brutality of the master by considerateness and love” (H. 173).

But, why the disproportionate amount of material here directed toward slaves and their masters when compared with what Paul has spoken to the other household members in vv. 18-21? As noted in the introduction to this entire section,

the fact that Onesimus accompanies this letter (4:8-9) likely led to the placement of more stress in speaking to other slaves in Colossae who might think of rebelling like Onesimus had done.

God and Paul are concerned for both the **employee**/worker and the **employer**/boss. Let us take to heart His commands.

- I. THE SEVEN-FOLD QUALITY OF THE BELIEVER'S WORK ("Obedience") (3:22-25)
 - Meaning of "slave" ; meaning of "obey."
 - Direction of obedience—"your fleshly lords/masters/bosses"—those on this earth.
 - A. Complete (22a)—"in all things"; same scope as with children in v. 20.
 - B. Genuine (22b)
 1. **Not** with "eye-service"—superficial, going through the motions, while the boss is watching.
 2. **Not** as "men-pleasers"-- attempt to please people by sacrificing principle; focus on appearances rather than reality.
 3. **With** sincerity of heart—singly focused concern; simple, no folds.
 4. **God fearing**—not master fearing! (*manner* of the sincere obedience from the heart); continuous.
 - C. Thorough (23a)—Once a person began serving the Lord he in his spirit ceased being a slave.
 1. Whatever you do. **Such assiduous service is especially important "because the reputation of Christ and Christianity was bound up with the quality of his service.** The process of doing the deed.
 2. Do it from the soul—heartily; "with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength."
 - D. Spiritual (23b)
 1. As for the Lord—the focus of all work must be God—for His pleasure and for His glory.
 2. Not for men—Paul is not saying that the believing servant should show any disrespect to his master.
 - E. Encouraging (24a)
 1. You have certain knowledge of your future—"because you know"; you have been taught already.
 2. You will receive the "reward of the inheritance"-- receiving what is due and receiving in full.
 - a. You get none in this life. God has determined to give you through His grace a full reward.
 - b. You, as a son of God, do get some from your true Master—Lord.
 - c. It is the reward that is the inheritance. **Even working for an earthly master; doing our daily work for Christ will result in lavish rewards.**
 - F. Privileged (24b)
 1. You must serve the Lord—the true heavenly Master.
 2. He is the Christ—Messiah; Him and no other.
 - G. Righteous (25)
 1. God will punish wrongdoing. (Must not follow Onesimus' example before his conversion!)
 - Surely at "the judgment seat of Christ where Paul uses this same verb (II Cor. 5:10).
 2. God shows no favoritism—he is not partial, does not receive a face.
- II. THE GODLY LEADERSHIP OF A CHRISTIAN BOSS (4:1)
 - There is a reciprocal responsibility of the master/boss, as with husbands and fathers above.
 - Give over/beside—on your part do so.
 - A. Just—you are responsible to do the right thing
 - B. Fair—you must do the fair thing-- The two words become practically synonymous here and can be rendered with words like our "fair and square."
 - C. Fear of God—you also will answer for your behavior to your own Master/Lord in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Far too many Christians have been poor workers; far too many bosses have been selfish and cruel.

Both are accountable to the heavenly Master/Lord—the Lord Christ. **7-fold emphasis on Lordship here.** (18,20,22,23,24,1)

How different work relationships and environments would be under Christ's lordship!

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