

Understanding Work

Colossians 3:22-4:1

August 27, 2017

DAY 1: Reciprocal commands to masters and slaves, bosses and workers

Colossians 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

²³ *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,*

²⁴ *since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.* ²⁵ *Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.*

Colossians 4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1. What initial thoughts strike you as you read these verse?
2. This week, we'll look at the workplace, through the lenses of Paul's words to masters and slaves. More on work, tomorrow.
3. As to slavery, the bible, at no point, ever endorses slavery as a divine ordinance in the same way as marriage, the family, the Sabbath, or government.
4. Additionally, slavery is not pleasing to God. No man was ever meant to own another man.
5. Historically, there were many different types of slavery or servitude. Some became slaves as prisoners of war, as criminals, through kidnapping, unpayable debts, or children born into slavery. Some were indentured servants like many Europeans who came to the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, trading seven years of service for a ship's passage across the Atlantic Ocean.
6. What is intriguing to me is how Paul addresses both slaves and masters.
7. Remarkably, the same principles Paul teaches regarding masters and slaves have striking applications in the modern workplace!
8. Which of today's verses resonates most with you? Why?

(Additional study: Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10. See also 1 Peter 2:18-25)

DAY 2: Workplace actions, responsibilities, and attitudes

Colossians 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

1. What ways have you observed others or yourself not having a good work ethic? List as many items as you can.

2. Slaves, like workers today were tempted to “cut corners, “clock in and clock out,” do just enough to “get by,” be lazy, or “put in the minimum and nothing more!” Additionally, one can only imagine the attitude struggles of slaves toward masters!

3. The principle of authority is found in the workplace, family, church, and government. The slave was told to “obey” his master. Though Paul says “in everything” it does not mean doing something that would violate scripture.

4. Why would it be important for the slave or the employee to learn to follow the master’s or boss’ instructions?

5. Paul says to do this, not just when you’re being watched, but all the time. Why is that important?

6. Paul gives two important motivations. For each, jot down what you think he means:

a. “...with sincerity of heart” -

b. “...with reverence for the Lord.”

7. How does your work ethic stack up with Paul’s? What needs your attention?

DAY 3: Workplace attitude and purpose

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ...

1. In the Greek language, the phrase underlined literally is "...work from the soul..."
2. The idea is a combination of these characteristics:
 - a. Whole-hearted,
 - b. Single-minded, and a
 - c. Fighting spirit.
3. Which of these three characteristics is your:
 - a. Strongest?

 - b. Weakest?
4. Paul gives the Christian a completely different framework from which to think about his work at the end of v. 23. What difference do you think it would make for a slave to think about his work as working for the Lord?
5. What difference would it make if you saw yourself "working for the Lord and not for men?"
6. Re-write Col. 3:23 in your own words:
7. What strikes you most from today's verses?

DAY 4: Reward and punishment

Colossians 3:24 ...since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

1. Paul reminds the slaves (and workers) of the bigger picture. No matter what our lot in life, no matter how little we may receive in this life, in eternity(!) we will be receiving an “inheritance” that will last for eternity, and be enjoyed all through eternity!

2. Below are some cross-references along the same theme. Underline the similarities, and jot down any thoughts that strike you:

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

*Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.
⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

3. Paul issues a stern warning regarding coming punishment for those who do wrong.

Col. 3:25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

4. The same promise is intended for both slave and master. This is seen in two ways:

a. “There is no favoritism” – God doesn’t “play favorites” between master and slave. Judgment is done with two open eyes.

b. The very next verse (tomorrow) is directed at masters and implies the same threat of judgment.

5. Your work ethic is not just about this life. Your work ethic has significance far beyond this life. You will enjoy or not enjoy the fruits of your labor!

6. What strikes you from today’s verses?

DAY 5: Work ethic for masters and bosses

Colossians 4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1. A literal translation from Greek to English reads, “Masters, that which is just and that which is fair, to the slaves grant.”
2. The master is to remember that he also has a Master ... in heaven!!
3. What effect does this have on you?
4. The slave is accountable to the master. The worker is accountable to the boss. Paul now adds, the master/boss is accountable to God!
5. One day, you and I will stand before God to give an accounting of our life. One of the items we will give account for is our work!
6. What would you like to be able to say to God about your work, when you stand face-to-face before him?

What strikes you most from today's verses?