

Col 3:22-4:1 “Since You’ve Been Raised with Christ – Serve the Lord Christ“ Oct 2, 2022
Proverbs 22:17-23:18
Psalm 52

This section of Proverbs is the first part of the ‘thirty sayings of the wise.’

There are lots of sayings about economics – and authority.

Wisdom requires careful attention to those who have gone before.

When it says, “Do not move the ancient landmark
that your fathers have set.”

That may be referring to property boundaries – at first –
but the idea here is that we should pay attention
to the wisdom of our ancestors.

Americans have generally valued youth over age –
energy over experience.

We need to recognize the importance of those ancient landmarks.

Your grandmother understood a lot about life –

She might not always be able to explain *why* she did what she did –
but much wisdom was passed on in the *doing* –
we ignore the past at our peril!

The next verse connects to that:

“Do you see a man skillful in his work?
He will stand before kings;
he will not stand before obscure men.”

How do you become *skillful* in your work?

You need to learn from those who have gone before you!

Likewise, “do not toil to acquire wealth” –

Why do you work?

The wise man does not work to acquire wealth.

The wise man works because he serves the Lord Christ.

Wealth is transient.

“When your eyes light on it, it is gone,
for suddenly it sprouts wings,
flying like an eagle toward heaven.”

But wisdom endures.

“Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.”

In contrast, Psalm 52 warns against boasting of evil –

if who do not make God your refuge – if you trust in the abundance of your riches –
then you are actually seeking refuge in your own destruction!

So let us trust in the steadfast love of God forever!

Sing TPH 52

Read Colossians 3:1-4:1

There are some interesting – and challenging – things to think about in these verses.

But before we get to them,

I want to start by saying the really obvious thing!

What Paul says to masters and slaves applies to *all of us*.

All of us – in one way or another – will be in charge of some project or situation.

Everyone – at some point – will be a master.

When you are in a position of authority – however great, however small –
treat those under your care justly and fairly.

Remember that you also have a Master in heaven –

and he will judge you by the same standard that you use

to govern those under your care!

We sometimes *think* that we like bosses who let us do whatever we want.

The only problem is that those bosses also let *everyone else*

do whatever they want!

And that's not so much fun!

We need bosses who will do what is just and fair – for everyone!

Because all of us – at some other point – will be bondservants.

All of us will be in a position of subordination –

where we have to submit to those in authority over us!

That's part of the brilliance of the U.S. Constitution.

Everyone has to submit to someone!

The President may have *executive* authority –

but he is only free to execute the laws that Congress passes –

under the scrutiny of the Supreme Court.

Congress can pass laws – but they can't enforce them –

and the Supreme Court may say whatever they like

about the constitutionality of a law –

but they can't actually *do anything* about it!

By the way, this is also true in much smaller worlds.

In my world, for instance,

I may be pastor – and father – to my sons.

But with respect to computers and technology,

I am Robert's inferior.

And with respect to carpentry and construction,

I am William's inferior.

And when we are the inferior –
we need to recognize and honor our superiors.

After all – you are serving the Lord Christ!
Jesus is King.
He is Lord.
He is Christ – the anointed King.

When you are at work – remember that you are no longer who you once were!
You are a servant of the Lord Jesus.
You are working not for man, but for King Jesus!

Now – sometimes that has been used
simply as a way of clubbing people into being obedient
“you better do what you are told – or Jesus won’t like it!” –
but that is *not* what Paul says!

What Paul says is that you are serving the Lord Christ.
Your work is not merely for your earthly master.
Your work – your everyday, ordinary labor –
is primarily about serving the kingdom of Jesus!

You’re not just working for a paycheck.
You’re not just working to advance the interests of your earthly boss.

Your purpose in your daily labors
is to advance the kingdom of Christ.

1. **Who You Are in Christ (v1-11)**
2. **Be Who You Are in Christ (v12-17)**
3. **...in the Workplace (v22-4:1)**
 - a. **Servants, Do Your Work Heartily, as for the Lord**
 - b. **Masters, Remember You Have a Master in Heaven (4:1)**

²² *Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, ^[f] not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

4 Masters, treat your bondservants ^[g] justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

The Apostle here speaks to Masters and Slaves.
How does that have anything to say to us?

It's easier to understand the commands to husbands and wives and fathers and children,
because we have similar social structures today,
but slavery was outlawed nearly 150 years ago.

We *can* just translate the language into "managers" and "employees."
But to make that translation,
we need to translate the whole picture!

You see, the master/slave relationship is still a household relationship.
In the ancient world, the household (the oikos) was the basic economic unit—
and the household could include hundreds of slaves and other laborers.

So when Paul and Timothy speak to "slaves,"
they are speaking to integral parts of the household;
slaves were not free to quit their "job" and seek better employment.
In the Roman world slaves were engaged in virtually every trade and position.
Indeed, even if your master freed you,
it was understood that you would continue to work in his household,
and freedmen – as they were called –
frequently served as business agents for their former masters.
It would have been impossible to go into business for yourself.

So how should we think about Paul's commands here?
Is Paul saying that the Master/Slave relationship is normative?
Is this some sort of "biblical economy"?

Paul does not enter into the theoretical question.
His concern is that we live as those who are raised with Christ.
And since many of the congregation were slaves—and some were also masters,
Paul wished to instruct them on how to think about their life together.
The apostles did not attempt to articulate a model of ideal economic life.
They called Christians to live as citizens of heaven
in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation.

Since you've been raised with Christ your attitude toward your work must change.

What makes your work "Christian"?

Take my friend Wayne, for instance.
Wayne is a public school teacher,
so if he does much evangelism, he'll probably get fired.
So shall we say that if he is a good teacher,
and does a good job teaching English,
that is what it means to be a "Christian" teacher?

But what about the English teacher across the hall?
He may be just as good a teacher as Wayne,
but he's not a Christian.

What is the difference?
What makes Wayne's work "Christian"?

What does Paul say?

Remember that in Colossians 3, Paul is teaching us
about how our union with Christ transforms our relationships with each other? (v11)
You have died with Christ,
and he has snipped away your old nature through the circumcision of Christ;
And you have been raised with Christ,
and your life is now hidden with him in God,
so that Paul can say in v9 that YOU HAVE PUT OFF the old man.
You are no longer who you used to be.
You are no longer a slave to sin and death.
You have been set free,
You have been recreated according to the image of Jesus Christ.

Every time you sin,
you deny who you are in Christ.
Every time you let sin master you,
you deny the Master who bought you.

Paul is applying this teaching to you daily labor.
Since you are a new creature in Christ,
let your lives show forth his transforming power.

So, what are the implications of this new reality for our lives in the workplace?
First, we need to understand the workplace...

Modern American corporate capitalism is a far cry from ancient Roman slavery.
The corporation has its roots in the medieval church.
Prior to the middle ages, land could only be held by the household or by the state
(and the state was generally viewed as the king's household).
But during the middle ages, the church was recognized as a corporate entity.
Whereas priests of other religions had lived on public lands,
the Christian church insisted that it was separate from the state.
Bishops and monasteries became leading landowners,
who held the land in trust for the church.
Gradually this principle was applied to the University as well.
Certain representatives of the corporation would hold the property in trust for the body,
assuming only limited legal liability.

In the 16-18th century this corporate principle began to be applied in other ways.
Corporate charters were granted to companies that were believed to benefit the public good,
such as companies for overseas trade and colonies.
Since such endeavors were very risky,
corporate charters allowed the risk to be spread widely and limited individual liability.

By the 19th century corporate charters began to be extended to other businesses.
Corporations enabled the wealthy to pool their resources and limit their risks.
The result was industrialization on a massive scale,
and with amazing speed.
Another result was labor unions.
If you allow the wealthy to pool their resources into corporate entities,
then it becomes equally necessary to allow labor
to pool their resources into corporate entities.

One of the most significant effects of this historical movement
is the movement of economic activity from the household to the corporation.
When Paul addresses Masters and Slaves,
he is addressing household relationships.
Economic activity in the Roman world was essentially household activity.
The household could consist of a dozen persons, or thousands of persons.
We may not think of that as a household—
but remember Abraham, who had 318 servants trained for war—
which if you include their wives and children—implies over a thousand in his household.
(It also puts a new spin on the question of household baptisms!)

But today, our households consist largely of nuclear families.
The amount of economic production that goes on in our households is minuscule.
Our economic lives are lived in the corporation—
whether as employees or as stockholders—sometimes both.

Every member of the first century household was involved
in some aspect of the household economy,
but today it is rare for two members of the same household
to have any substantive economic relationship.
If the husband works and the wife stays home,
then he has his economic world,
and she has her domestic world.
If they both work,
then they usually live in two different economic worlds—
and their children live in neither.

It's worth noting that all of the discussion of parents and children –

husbands and wives –
was *also* about economics!
Every member of the household was engaged in the same business!

But if we are going to translate these principles into the modern world,
then we need to think about the corporation as a sort of “household.”

Like I said earlier, the corporation was actually patterned after the church.
but it has certain duties borrowed from the household.

The Latin word “corpus” means “body” –
so a corporation is a body –
a legal person designed around a common economic purpose.

But a corporation offers all sorts of moral dilemmas.
Since the stockholders do not generally know each other,
it is very difficult to assume moral responsibility for *your* company.

But if you own stock in a company, then you are one of its owners.
You have invested your money in that company in order to make money.
Therefore while corporate status provides you with limited legal liability
for what the corporation does,
you still have a moral responsibility for how you make your money.

In 2 Corinthians 6 Paul warns the Corinthians against being unequally yoked.
He refers back to Deuteronomy 22:10, which forbade yoking a donkey with an ox,
and says that this principle is at work in our economic relationships.
The principle plainly is directed towards those who have a choice in the matter.
A slave is under orders, and therefore has no choice as to his yokefellows.

But masters do.

Paul has set forth his principle earlier in 1 Corinthians 10 when he says
“Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake.”
In other words, the meat may have been sacrificed to an idol—but that doesn’t matter.
Your conscience is not bound by what someone else has done.
He goes on to say that if an unbeliever invites you over for dinner,
“eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience’ sake.
But if anyone says to you, ‘This was offered to idols,’
do not eat for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience’ sake.
‘Conscience’, I say, not your own, but that of the other.”
In other words, you will not be guilty of idolatry because you eat meat sacrificed to idols.
But do not join in the religious practices of idolatry.

It is to the same people, who lived in the same context,
that Paul addresses his words in 2 Corinthians 6.
Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.
Do not knowingly put yourself in a position
where you will be joining in the sins of others.

I believe this provides us with the principles
by which we must engage in our economic life today.
The modern corporation is a mixed body, yoking together believers and unbelievers.
Paul's argument for not being unequally yoked
is that righteousness has no fellowship with lawlessness.
I don't think that this means that Christians can only work for – or hold stock in
“Christian” corporations.
After all, most of you probably have very little control over where your stock is invested.

But remember that as a stockholder, as a board member, as a manager –
if you are part of a corporation, that means that you are a “Master.”

Make sure that your servants are given what is just and fair,
because God will hold you accountable for how you treat them!
Remember that as a member of the corporation,
a member of the body of that company,
you are yoked together with that corporation.
If you have been raised with Christ,
then you must operate by the principles laid out in Colossians 3.
You must seek to encourage that corporate body to be kind and humble,
Not greedy and grasping.

Masters (stockholders, board members, and those in management)
must be fair and just (4:1)
In imitation of Christ,
do not show partiality or favoritism (note v25).
Being fair and just means be fair to them,
and not by the culture's standards, but by Christ's.

American industry generally ignores this teaching (as do most cultures).
Many would say “let the market decide” what is just and fair.
If the market is allowed to set wages,
then there are times when wages
will leave millions of people in poverty.
Because the “market” doesn't care what is just and fair.
But Paul says that masters *must* pay what is just and fair.

Our Master in heaven is not pleased.

Many of you may have experienced this.
Our economic system is not structured to be just and fair.
It is not structured to provide stability for families and communities.
It is structured to reward greed and covetousness.
Most masters are not interested in providing what is just and fair,
but in providing as little as they have to in order to maintain their work force.
There are some exceptions,
but how often have you heard of employers
putting the interests of their workers ahead of their own?

But you who are masters,
you are to be those exceptions.
you are to seek how you may provide for your workers what is just and fair,
not just compared to everyone else,
but compared to how Christ has treated you.

Because this is Paul's second point to masters:
you are a servant, use your authority to serve rather than dominate
Remember whose servant you are.
Imitate your heavenly Master,
who gives generously to his servants,
praising them for the little good that they do,
gently rebuking them for their many sins.
You are to be like Christ in your relationship to your workers.

But most of you are also the employees of corporations.
If your company has stock options, then you are in a really strange situation—
you are your own master AND your own slave!
Of course, our economic system is a historical oddball.
You actually can choose where you work.
If you don't like your master, you can find another one—
or become your own boss by starting your own business.

Some have argued that because of the danger of being yoked together with unbelievers
in modern corporations,
the best thing to do is start your own business and operate it with a household economy.
But remember that Paul called Colossian slaves to obey their masters wholeheartedly,
in spite of the numerous abuses of slavery in the Roman empire.

Therefore, despite the numerous abuses of modern corporate life,
Christians are called to live within the modern corporate world.
I admit that it would be much easier to go the reclusive route.
It is much more difficult to live within the world, without becoming “of it.”

It's worth noting that Paul and Timothy send the letter to the Colossians
along with another letter—
a letter to a slaveholder of Colossae named Philemon.

Paul challenges Philemon to act like a Christian—not like a typical Roman slaveholder.
Philemon had the legal right to kill Onesimus for running away,
yet Paul calls on him to respond with love and forgiveness—
indeed, perhaps even by setting Onesimus free.
Philemon was called to be a slaveholder unlike other Roman slaveholders.
Likewise, you are called to be stockholders, managers,
and employees of American corporations
unlike other American stockholders, managers, and employees.

And no, that doesn't mean that you have to kick up a fuss about “hot button” issues—
like whether the corporation provides funding for Planned Parenthood
or whether it invests in Disney, etc.

Rather, you are called, as Paul says, quoting the Isaiah and Samuel,
“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.
I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,
says the LORD Almighty.”

This means that you must have nothing to do with the covetousness and greed (the idolatry)
of the people around you.

They are trying to climb the corporate ladder;
all they may care about is the bottom line.
You cannot think that way.

Those that draw the line at abortion and gay rights have missed the point.
The reason why modern corporations are involved in such moral degradation
is because immorality PAYS.
You must labor in your calling as a part of that economic body,
but you must do so in a way that promotes kindness, humility, and forgiveness.

If you would act as a Christian in your economic life,
then you must live according to the principles Paul has set forth in Colossians 3.

It may mean that you get run over by unscrupulous competitors.
Paul does not promise material prosperity
to those who live according to the Word of God.

But you must care for each other in such a way
that those who get trampled by the greed of this world
are refreshed and restored by the mercy of the body of Christ.

Likewise, as subordinates, how should we act?

First, We should fear God rather than men
who is your master?

When you go to work,
do you work because your boss tells you to?
or do you work because Christ tells you to?
That's exactly what Paul calls "eyeservice" here in v22.
"Eyeservice" means service which is given
when your earthly master has his eyes on you.
Basically it means that you perform well when they're watching,
but poorly when they're not.

Who is your master?
Whom do you fear?

Are you more afraid of what your boss thinks of you,
or what God thinks of you?
Paul commands us to live our lives under the eyes of Christ.

That's exactly what it means that our lives are now hidden with Christ in God.
It means that your life is so bound up with Christ,
that all that he is has been given to you.
Which means that God is as intimately concerned with the details of your life,
as he is with the life of his own Son, Jesus Christ.
So first, we are to work throughout our lives in the fear of God, not men

Second, "whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not to men." (v23)

In other words,
do what you are called to do,
and do it with integrity and satisfaction.
The phrase "do it heartily" could be translated, "work from the soul!"
You may be working in a dead-end job.
There's nothing wrong with looking for a new job,
but as long as you are in that job,
that is what GOD has called you to do.

Think about that.

God has called you to work in that factory.
God has called you to make that latte.

Your boss didn't call you to do that.

Your everyday labor is pleasing to God,
when it is done from the soul--from the heart.

Work that is pleasing to God is not just evangelism,
it can be everything that a Christian does.

BUT, just because a Christian does it does something,
doesn't make it pleasing to God.

Is God pleased when I turn in all my assignments on time,

just to make my professors happy?

No.

Whatever we do is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus,
and is to be done as to the Lord, and NOT to men.

This brings us to the third implication for subordinates:

serve Christ, because your inheritance comes from him;
don't focus on the reward, that is already guaranteed.
There is nothing that you can do to increase your inheritance.
All that is Christ's is yours--there is nothing more to get.
Selfishness has no place in the Kingdom!

Notice how Paul puts it,
it is not that you are to serve Christ IN ORDER to receive a reward,
but rather, because you know that it is from the Lord
that you will receive your inheritance,
therefore serve HIM.

Paul starts with the statement of fact:

You will receive the reward of the inheritance from Christ.
That is why you serve him.

Because of what God has done for you in Christ,
THEREFORE, out of gratitude (v17),
out of the peace that rules your hearts (v15),
because of Christ's promises (v24),
serve him.

What makes labor Christian?

When Christ is at the center.
When the gospel of our Lord Jesus has so gripped your heart and mind,
that you approach even the trivial aspects of your work
as service to the King of Kings,
THEN, your work is Christ-centered.

And so the final point Paul makes to subordinates is a warning:
do what is right (v25)

Those who do wrong will be repaid in kind.

Our freedom in Christ is not an excuse to do evil.

Those who work for the praise of men will NOT receive the praise of God.

Even so,

those who work for the praise of men may receive praise here,
but will not receive the praise of God hereafter.

Whose praise do you seek?