

Oct. 4, 2020

# New Attitudes for Old Relationships

Colossians 3:22-4:1

## *Adorning the doctrine of God at Work*

Christians proclaim the preeminence of Christ to the world

by how we follow and lead.

LTS: Titus 2:1-10

The apostle Paul has been showing us since the beginning of chapter 3, how the rich eternal truths behind our salvation are designed to impact our lives in tangible and practical ways. We have been called by God with a holy calling that was established by all three Persons of the Trinity - even before the creation of the world. And now that that calling has brought about our salvation in real time, the effects should be readily observable by anyone who regularly interacts with us.

As children of God we are to be imitators of God (5:1). And the way we imitate God most noticeably is by submitting ourselves to one another in the fear of Christ (5:21). As God the Son and God the Spirit willingly and joyfully submit to God the Father, so Christians are to live with an obvious attitude of joyful humility and submission in relation to one another.

Wives, for example, are to submit to their husbands, and husbands, even while they lead, are to sacrificially serve their wives. Children are to obey their parents and parents, even as they lead, are to serve and train their children without provoking and discouraging them. Such willful humility is the foundational attitude of a home that pleases the Lord. But there's more to consider.

In the first century, family relationships extended beyond that of husband and wife, parents and children. Unlike our day, most homes also included the relationship of servants and masters.

The Romans Empire of the first century was a world of slavery. It has been estimated that there were about sixty million slaves under Roman rule during the days

of Paul. That means about 1/3 of the population of large cities such as Rome, were slaves.<sup>1</sup> Clearly there were some (perhaps many) members of the Colossians church who lived as servants, just as surely as there were masters. In fact, we don't have to speculate about this because the little book of Philemon has as its leading characters a run-away slave named Onesimus and Philemon his Master. Both of these men lived in Colossae and Philemon was a prominent member of the church there.

Unlike American slavery of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were a number of ways a person could become a slave under Roman rule. You could become a slave by committing crimes against the state, or by being captured in war. But you could also become a slave by indenturing yourself to someone to pay back a debt. In some cases, a man would willingly submit himself to slavery in order to become a Roman citizen.

Elaborating on the topic, R. Kent Hughes points out that it was often true that outward appearances gave no evidence to distinguish a slave from a free person. A slave could be a custodian, a salesman, or a CEO. Many slaves lived separately from their owners. Roman slavery in the first century was typically more humane and civilized than the American/African slavery practiced in this country much later.<sup>2</sup>

Some slaves were men of learning who served in skilled capacities in education and civil service; some were able to accumulate considerable wealth or influence. For example, Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, before whom Paul appeared (Acts. 23:23), was once a slave but had managed to establish his freedom and gain political position.

In any case, the reality was that the Roman economic machine was firmly built upon the backs of slaves. They were the ones who did all the labor. They were often the teachers, the stewards of households, the farmers, the grunt laborers. And all of them lived in relationship to masters who were often the heads of households and ran various kinds of businesses from their homes. In many ways, masters were the equivalent of modern-day employers and the servants were his employees.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Wheaton, Crossway, 1990), 205

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, p. 206

On Roman slavery see also, John MacArthur, *The MacArthur N.T. Commentary series: Ephesians*, (Chicago, Moody Publishers, 1986), 323-325.

Now, clearly this is the bridge between Paul's culture and our own. The application of his words here is relevant to everyone who has a job or is an employer of others. And the question that Paul is seeking to answer is this: "How is a Christian to represent Christ at work? What attitudes and behaviors should mark his life in the marketplace so as to glorify Christ in his labor?" This morning I want to give you four distinguishing marks of a faithful representative of Christ on the job.

Before we begin, however, let's stand and read our text for the morning.

Read Col. 3:22-4:1

The first distinguishing mark of faithful representative of Christ at work is...

## I. Submission (22)

1. Paul begins this new topic (22) by declaring that slaves are to be obedient "in everything to those who are your earthly masters."
2. The word for slaves here is *doulos*, which is the general term for servant or slave. These were real people who had come to Christ and though they were slaves, they were considered part of the church.
3. As an aside here, it's instructive to note how the church, unlike the world, viewed slaves as individuals worthy of respect. Notice Paul is addressing them directly. He is not speaking about them as if they were a commodity. He is addressing them directly as bona fide members of the family of God.
4. In doing so, Paul demonstrates that servants, just like every other member of society, have a high calling in Christ. They have a special God-given assignment in the kingdom of God through which the Lord Jesus is building His church. They may be slaves, but they are not second-class citizens in the economy of heaven.
5. In the 1500's when the Protestant Reformation was taking Europe by storm, there was a word for God's call of a person into ministry. That word was **Vocation**. The only people who had a "Vocation" were priests in the R.C.C. But when the sufficiency

and centrality of Scripture was recovered, so was the intrinsic and spiritual value of one's work – no matter what that work may be! (food-service worker, home-school mom. Teacher, president of the united states, et al). Whatever work God has given you to do, that is your vocation. It is your God-ordained assignment by which His glory is to be set on display by you.<sup>3</sup>

6. The place where you labor for the Lord is the most obvious place for the gospel to show forth in your life. Of course, it's true not everyone will appreciate it. You may even suffer for it. But God loves a diligent worker. He cares about your work more than you know. In God's household people work for their employer as if it their job were a divine calling into ministry.

7. Think of it this way: God has created us (Eph. 2:10) "for good works." Most of those works are going to take place at work... whatever your work may be! You may not be called to be a pastor, but you are called to do something. In fact, in your lifetime, you may experience many different opportunities to work for an employer – whether its for Goldman Sacks, Lockheed Martin, a "Mom & Pop dry-cleaning service or something as lofty and lucrative as becoming an associate at Chick-fil-A. It all matters to God. And in each of those opportunities for gainful employment your highest calling will be to represent Christ by how you work. In God's eyes, to rank yourself under your master (i.e. your employer) is to rank yourself under Christ by which he is glorified.

8. The word for obedient here is the same word Paul used in addressing the children of the household. It means to "listen under." It's the idea of taking orders from a rightful authority and carrying them out as instructed.

9. You will remember when Jesus met the Centurion in Mat. 8. the man explained why it was unnecessary for Jesus to come to his home to heal his servant. He said, I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." This is the kind of posture that Paul is calling Christian employees to take.

10. What goal should a Christian employee have in the marketplace?

A. 2 Cor. 5:9 Paul writes, "Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to [the Lord]".

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<sup>3</sup> I intended to include the Luther Quote about the Milkmade's milking being equal in God's sight with the Monk's praying. But upon further researching the quote, I discovered that Luther never said this famous "quote."

B. Eph. 5:10 Paul says we should be “Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

11. Do you see a pattern here? The ultimate goal that should define all other goals on the job should be this, that our labor would please the Lord.

12. In fact, while this may sound like a radical proposition to you, our ultimate goal should not even be to provide for our families. The Lord has promised to take care of that for us as we work and even when we cannot work (Joe Oliver)

13. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you” (Mat. 6:31-33).

14. Listen, if you understand that your great calling on the job is to please the Lord who has promised to take care of you, then submitting to your employer becomes a much more reasonable proposition. What do you have to lose?

15. Do you want to make an impact for Christ at your workplace? Before you begin sharing the gospel verbally, try responding to your supervisor with a submissive, obedient spirit as to the Lord.

16. Understand, then, that our primary role in the work place is to represent Christ, who, by the way, “although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

17. Do you want to represent Christ on the job? Then imitate Christ on the job. Humble yourself in obedience to the authority over you.

18. So, the first distinguishing mark of a faithful representative of Christ at work is obedience. The second distinguishing mark we might say, is...

## II. Respect

1. In Eph. 6:5 Paul adds a phrase that is not in Colossians. It reads, “be obedient to your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling.”
2. The word for fear (*phobos*) could mean anything from Reverence to Terror. It’s the same word used in 5:21 where Paul begins this section by saying that we must “be subject to (or “rank ourselves under”) one another in the fear of Christ. “Fear and trembling often arrive in the text together to communicate the need for seriousness, such as when Paul tells us to “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.
3. In this case Paul is calling for sober and serious respect. Christians should not only obey their employers but gives them due respect as well.
4. Now here is a rare commodity in the workplace of western society. To have employees who refuse on principle to NOT disrespect their employer. I mean, who wouldn’t want an employee like that?
5. But in Paul’s mind, it’s not a good name for one’s self that the Believer seeks to gain. It is a good name for Christ and His gospel that is the goal. That’s why Paul wrote to Timothy saying (1 Tim. 6:1), “All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.”
6. This was so important to Paul, in fact, that he wrote essentially the same thing to Titus saying,

“Urge bond slaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (2:9-10).
7. You see, once you let your employer know that you are a Christian, from that moment on you walk into work, as it were, **dressed in the gospel**. You will either wear it in a way that honors Christ or in a way that dishonors Him. If you want to honor Him, then be respectful to your employer, even when he is not around.
8. So, the first distinguishing mark of a faithful representative of Christ on the job is obedience followed by respect. A third distinguishing mark of a faithful representative of Christ in the job is...

### III. Diligence

1 In verse 23 Paul tells us to work Not by way of eye-service, as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

2. Paul's concern here is that a Christian employee might work hard so long as his employer is watching, but then slack off when his boss turns away. This is "eye-service." Paul wants to remind us that sin and righteousness are always matters of the heart. The work you do for your employer should be of a quality and diligence that the Lord is pleased with it no matter what your boss observes. The Lord sees your sincerity of heart even when your boss is not around!

3. Illustration:

I remember a missionary story from my childhood wherein one of our church's missionaries was attempting to clear a field for an airstrip on a rather remote island. He managed to pull together from a nearby village a team of 30 workers with machetes and gave them clear instructions how much of the field needed to be cleared by the end of the day. Putting the men to work on the project, the missionary went to tend to other business. A few hours later he came back to inspect their work only to discover that most of the men were sitting around and leaning the Palm Trees having done very little actual work. The missionary then explained that they needed to work as hard when their boss was gone as when he is there. They all agreed and got back to work. A couple hours later the missionary went back to inspect their work again, and again he found them loafing!

As it turns out the missionary had lost an eye in the war and had a prosthetic eyeball that he could remove when necessary. So, in a stroke of genius, the missionary gathered all the workers around him and told them how disappointing it was to find that they had ceased working as soon as he was out of sight. Then, reaching into his eye-socket, he removed his prosthetic eye and carefully set it on a large rock facing the direction of the men and the field. Then he announced that from now on he would be keeping an eye on them from afar. A few hours later he once

again came back to inspect their work, and to his amazement he found that their field had been almost completely cleared!

4. Paul is teaching us that we should work as men and women who know for certain that while our employers may not see the diligence with which we work, the Lord always sees. So, we should labor with “Sincerity of heart.”
5. The English word sincere comes from two Latin words. The first is *sine* which means “without.” and *cera* meaning “wax.” So, the word “sincere” literally means “without wax”. (dishonest potters used wax to disguise cracks and a wise customer would hold the pottery up to the sun because light would show through the wax and expose the flaw) Good pottery was often marked *sinecira* (“without wax”) as proof of its quality.
6. In the Greek, however, the word is *aploteti*, which carries the idea of generosity, liberality, mental honesty, the virtue of one who is free from pretense and hypocrisy. The idea is that the Christian employee who seeks to represent Christ well in the work place, should not only be obedient and respectful to his employer, but he should also be committed to producing the best quality work he can give.
7. We don’t just show up to do a job. We show up with a heart that really desires to please the Lord with its quality.
8. Working with sincerity of heart means we try to make the quality of our work measure up to the Lord’s standards. We don’t cut corners or disguise laziness behind the veil of feigned business. Is your work worthy of the Lord? Is your labor pleasing to the Lord?
9. The employer of such a man or woman never has to wonder if he is getting an honest day’s work for a day’s pay. This is a trust-worthy employee who seeks to do his best no matter what the task.
10. So the faithful representative of Christ on the job is Obedient, Respectful, Diligent, then fourth and finally, a faithful representative of Christ on the job is marked by...

## IV. Loyalty

1. Paul says, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”
2. It is significant to notice that the word heartily is NOT the same word for heart (*Kardia*) used in the previous verse. The word heartily actually means “from the soul.” Once again, this is about having a new attitude for an old relationship. The loyalty Paul is calling for is not one that is motivated by money, personal advancement, or corporate glory. No, it is a kind of loyalty that is energized by the gospel. It is loyalty to the exalted Christ that benefits one’s earthly employer.
3. Such a worker does not need prompting or threatening to get him to do his job. He is glad to render service to his employer because in his heart it is really service to Christ.
4. This is a worker who desires to see his employer succeed in his business endeavors. He wants the company to prosper. He desires to see the blessing of the Lord upon the company or business. So, he is happy to give his all. It is his delight to be obedient, respectful, diligent and loyal to his employer. No mutiny. No stealing from the company. No cutting corners.
5. Now you may be thinking at this point, “Wow, this is a pretty tall order. Where do I find the motivation to work like that? Paul knew we would ask, so he concludes with these words.
6. Read v. 24: ...“knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.
7. You think your company offers a good retirement plan? You aint seen nothing till you’ve seen what Jesus has laid aside for you. It will be your eternal inheritance.

### Conclusion:

1. Finally, Paul throws in a final word to employers. Read v. 9.
2. For those of you who are employers, the Lord has a word for you, too. You see, just as believing husbands and parents are called to “rank themselves under” those they

lead, so too you are called to “rank yourself under” your Employees in the fear of Christ.

3. Your employee’s obedience, respect, diligence and loyalty ought to be matched by similar characteristics from you. As they seek to serve Christ in faithfulness to you, you are to serve Christ in faithfulness to them.

4. You see, in the end you both slaves. And you both serve the same Master. And He shows no partiality. You don’t get extra credit in heaven because of your status as an employer. The question will simply be, were you faithful to represent Christ where you work.

*Christians proclaim the preeminence of Christ to the world  
by how we follow and lead.*

### Comparison of Ephesians & Colossians

Ephesians 4:5-9	Colossians 3:22-4:1
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**I. Obedience:** <sup>5</sup>Bondservants, obey your earthly masters

**II. Respect** with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,

**III. Diligence** <sup>6</sup> not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,

**IV. Loyalty:** <sup>7</sup> rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

**V. Masters:** <sup>9</sup> Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

**I. Obedience:** <sup>22</sup> Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters,

**II. Diligence:** not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup>

**III. Loyalty:** Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> [negative motivation] For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

**Masters:** <sup>1</sup> Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.