

“A Charge to Masters”  
Colossians 4:1  
(Preached at Trinity, December 16, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has been declaring the reality of God's transforming grace. God's chosen people live lives that are distinct and different.  
**Colossians 3:12 NAU** - "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"  
Paul describes this again in his letter to the Thessalonians. He recognized the reality of God's grace upon His elect:  
**1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 NAU** - "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of *you* in our prayers; <sup>3</sup> constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, <sup>4</sup> knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you"
2. As Christians, Jesus is the focus of all that we do.  
**Colossians 3:17 NAU** - "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."
3. Beginning with **Verse 18** Paul describes the practical effect of God's transforming grace upon the family – wives & husbands, children & parents, slaves & masters.  
It may seem strange to include slaves and masters in the same context as the family. As I pointed out before, slavery was very accepted in the 1st century and slaves were very much a part of domestic life. They often had a significant role in raising the children.  
It is hard for us to hear teaching on slaves, particularly knowing our history.  
The NT neither condemns nor condones slavery  
It just simply recognizes its reality - It focuses mostly on the proper behavior of slaves and masters rather than on the ethical issues of the institution itself.
4. Previously, before God saved him, the slave saw his position as an injustice—something to rebel against. His master was one to be despised. This would have been among the motives for Onesimus fleeing from his master, Philemon.  
Now all of his service is done with an eye to Christ. The Christian slave was to render to his master faithful service as unto Christ. The Gospel enables the slave to look beyond the circumstance of his condition and turn his heart towards honoring Christ, even in servitude. The Gospel is truly transforming.
5. Paul places greater emphasis upon his instruction to slaves—four verses to the slaves with only one to the masters. It is likely the Colossian church contained a greater number of slaves than masters. Although Paul gives firm direction to the slaves, he does not diminish the duty of masters towards the slaves under their authority.

6. Paul has given three examples of submission: wives to husbands, children to parents, and now slaves to masters. But in each case Paul stresses that the one in authority has a high duty to keep.
- Husbands love your wives and don't be embittered against them.
  - Parents be cautious how you train your children. Don't exasperate them.
- And now masters: "grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven."
7. Paul doesn't command the Christian master to free his slaves. As I pointed out last time, the NT doesn't address the societal or ethical issues of slavery. This was a real difficulty for abolitionists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But they realized that the absence of condemnation is not the same thing as commendation. This passage wasn't the place to go when speaking on the evils of 19<sup>th</sup> century slavery.
- a. Paul is dealing with relationships in this passage. He is describing the effect of God's grace upon every relationship.  
**Colossians 3:17 NAU** - "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus"  
**Ephesians 5:21 NAU** - "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."
- b. Paul doesn't command the master to free his slaves but focuses upon his behavior towards his slaves. He commands the master to treat his slaves with justice and fairness.
8. Again, Paul's point isn't to give a polemic against slavery. He is simply teaching how Christianity impacts how the slave lives as a slave and how master treats his slave. Paul is not giving instruction here on how to change society. He *is* teaching how the Christian lives within society. He does the same thing in Romans 13 as he tells us to submit to the civil authority. He doesn't describe the evils of the Roman Emperor. He simply charges submission to the authority.
9. Don't forget the context of the Book of Colossians. Paul is the prisoner of Nero, one of the cruelest of the Roman Emperors. Yet, how does Paul spend his time in prison? Does he spend his time writing invectives against Nero and the Roman government? Does he write one political treatise after another. NO! He writes to the Colossian church in order to encourage them to sound doctrine and holy living.
10. The wonderful thing is that Christianity has a powerful effect upon the world around it. As Jesus said, we are light to shine forth the glory of Christ and we are salt to bring a sweet savor and preserving grace to everything we touch. Slavery faded in significance throughout antiquity largely because of the powerful influence of Christianity. It was the impact of Christianity that brought an end to slavery in our country.
11. We change culture through our holy example and righteous testimony and through our clear teaching of the Word of God. But we always remember that this world will never be made righteous. We don't look to the kingdoms of this world as our hope. Our church must always focus on powerful preaching and holy lives, not on political activism.

12. This is why the NT maintains a consistent pattern of pressing upon us how to live.  
**1 Peter 2:12-18 NAU** - " Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. <sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. <sup>15</sup> For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. <sup>16</sup> Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. <sup>18</sup> Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable."
13. Christianity not only has an impact upon those who are under authority. It has an impact upon those IN authority. Those in authority also have duty to lead with grace, humility, and justice. Just as Christian conversion has changed the mind and disposition of the slave it also has made a tremendous transformation upon the master. Before salvation the slave was taught to behave one way and the master was taught to behave another way. Now Paul is saying, "masters, do the same things to them" – Eph. 6:9
14. This passage has much to say regarding those in authority. All of us at one time or another find ourselves in a place of authority. All of us are also under authority. Both positions carry great responsibility.
15. There are several things a person with authority needs to understand.
- I. Before God, the Master holds the same Position as the Slave –  
**Colossians 4:1 NAU** - "you too have a Master in heaven."  
**Ephesians 6:9 NAU** - "knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."
- A. Before God we are all sinners under the same condemnation and in need of the same grace.
1. All of us are absolute total failures – All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Not one of us have met God's demands.
  2. Every man will be judged equally – both slave and free  
**1 Peter 1:17 NAU** - "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth"  
**2 Corinthians 5:10 NAU** - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."  
**Ephesians 6:8 NAU** - "knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free."  
**Colossians 3:25 NAU** - "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."

- B. God is no respecter of persons. This has great impact upon Christianity.
1. There is equality in Christ – equality in blessings, but also equality in responsibility before Christ our Master.  
**Galatians 3:28 NAU** - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
  2. Equality doesn't mean there are no distinctions – there are men and women and slave and free. All of these distinctions have been found in the Christian church. In the Church of Colossae there would have been both slaves and masters.
  3. It also doesn't mean that God hasn't assigned particular functions within the church. Men and women do not serve the same function. Within the church all are not gifted equally. Not all will be pastors or deacons or teachers.
  4. It does mean that all who are in Christ share equally in the promises of the New Covenant. We share equally in the blessings of redemption and of adoption. And we share equally in our service to Christ.
  5. Both Christian slaves and Christian masters were a part of the body of Christ and so part of one another. This carries a high responsibility to care for the wellbeing of one another.  
 Paul commands the master: - "grant to your slaves justice and fairness"  
 Slaves were often the victims of injustice.  
 Masters were to rule their slaves according to Christian love with grace, gentleness, and mercy.  
**Colossians 3:12-14 NAU** - "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity."
  6. The early church would have had slaves and masters worshipping in the same church, loving and caring for one another. They were absolutely equal before Christ. This, however, did not remove the slave/master relationship.
  7. If an employer worships in the same church as his employees it doesn't change this relationship. On Monday morning he is still the boss.  
 This can sometimes create an unusual dichotomy.  
 What happens if a bi-vocational pastor has his employer as one of the members of his church? His employer is to honor his pastor and submit to his authority.  
 But, like the slave, the pastor should not expect favored treatment from the employer while at work. He is to work hard and honor the authority of his boss.

II. The master serves the same Master as the slave

**Colossians 4:1 NAU** - "knowing that you too have a Master in heaven."

A. We are all servants of Christ - He is our Master

1. This is how Paul consistently identified himself

**Romans 1:1 NAU** - " Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,"

δοῦλος

2. We are bought with a price - He owns us

3. We are under His law and dominion

4. The master must recognize he isn't the ultimate master. He too is a slave. All who are in authority are under authority. Masters will give account to Christ their Master.

5. This is true of all who are in authority, husbands, fathers, employers, magistrates. They are all serving the chief Master before whom they will give account.

**Hebrews 13:17 NAU** - "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account."

B. Christ is the ultimate Judge of all men

1. He sees all - nothing escapes His notice. While we do not serve our earthly masters with eye-service, we are mindful of the ever-watchful eye of Christ.

2. We are accountable for everything we say and do. Even our thoughts.

**Mat 12:36 NAU** - "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment."

**2 Corinthians 5:10 NAU** - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

3. We are the slaves of Christ. This should affect everything in our lives. Our life is a life of servitude to our Master. Jesus is our Lord. This must not merely be an empty word.

4. A recognition that all of us as Christians are fellow servants should have a mighty impact upon how we interact with one another. Too often we set ourselves up as if we are the ultimate judge of our brothers and sisters. We criticize and condemn. We think we have all the answers. They are not OUR servants.

**Romans 14:4 NAU** - "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

### III. The Master has the same Purpose as the Slave

**Colossians 3:17 NAU** - "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

A. This verse provides the foundation for Paul's instruction for domestic life

1. Wives are to be subject to their own husbands as fitting in the Lord
2. Husbands are to love their wives. In **Ephesians** Paul adds, "As Christ loved the church."
3. Children are to obey their parents because this is pleasing to Christ.
4. Both slave and master are to live their lives with an eye towards pleasing Christ.

Slaves are to serve their masters "with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord."

Masters are to care for their slaves remembering that they too have a Master in Heaven.

B. Our high purpose is to bring God glory

**Colossians 3:17 NAU** - "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus

**1 Corinthians 10:31 NAU** - "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

1. Our purpose is to declare God's glory to the nations
2. Our purpose is to shine forth Christ in every aspect of our lives in whatever condition He has placed us – wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters, employees and employers, teachers and students
3. Both slaves and masters are stretching forth for the same prize.
4. Both the slave and the master should keep their focus upon Christ.

a. The Bible is far more concerned about our relationship with God than with our particular earthly condition. This doesn't mean our earthly condition is irrelevant. It simply means that our chief emphasis is always upon God. What effect does our relationship with God have upon our relationship with men?

**Matthew 6:33 NAU** - "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness"

**Colossians 3:2 NAU** - "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

**Philippians 3:20 NAU** - "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"

b. Both slaves and masters must be vigilant to live holy lives because Christ the Master is watching.

**Ephesians 6:6 NAU** - "not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

### Conclusion:

1. Do you approach life with an eye always upon Christ? This is true whether you are a husband or wife, a parent or a child, a slave or a master, an employee or employer – and on and on.  
**Colossians 3:1 NAU** - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."
2. Christ must be at the center. Paul has been stressing this during this entire section  
 Ultimately, the only person you need to please is Christ.  
 Earthly masters may fail to notice the excellence of your work, but your Heavenly Master never ceases to watch and will not fail to give recompense.  
**Colossians 3:23-24 NAU** - "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."
3. Do you give the same excellence towards your work when the boss is not present as when he is? Do you put in a full day's work seeking to be faithful to your employer? Do you recognize that it is actually service to Christ?  
 I've seen church members get mad over some issue in the church and quit attending, or they stop serving. What was their motivation for service to begin with?
4. Some of you have given acts of service to the church that no one knows about. You've done acts of service for one another. But Christ knows.
5. Grace will lead you to do acts of kindness to people who fail to show you appreciation. Even better, grace will lead you to do acts of kindness when they don't even know it was you who did it. But Christ knows!  
 This is the nature of the Christian life. We have a higher observer.  
 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."