

## Lesson 14 – Colossians 3:22-4:1

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### Review/Introduction

The apostle Paul has detailed person and work of Christ and the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ for salvation and sanctification in chapters one and two of Colossians. Union with Christ is the doctrinal prerequisite to walking with Christ. Chapters three and four address how the believer is to walk in light of Christ's supremacy and sufficiency. Here is where Paul exhorts the Colossians (and us) to strive in the power of the Spirit to walk in our position; to live out in practice what we already are in Christ.

Living a consistently God glorifying life is only possible through Spirit-filling. The Christian life is not lived in one's own strength. It is a life lived filled with the Spirit as the life of Christ flows through you. As the believer repents of all known sin (Eph 4:30), bows before God in complete submission (1 Thess 5:19), and is immersed in the word (Col 3:16), they will be filled with the Spirit and will therefore exhibit the fruits of the Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit (letting the words of Christ to richly dwell within you) produces manifold blessings – observable, tangible manifestations of strength, character, and your connection to God through Christ. Specifically, it produces supernatural words, worship, reactions, and fulfilling of relational roles in one's life.

In the marriage relationship, Spirit-filling will be manifested in the wife submitting to her husband and the husband loving his wife as Christ loves the church. In the parenting relationships, a Spirit-filled child will obey his/her parents and the father (parents) will encourage (not exasperate nor provoke to anger) the children.

Today we look at the slave-master relationship.

### Theology of Work

Let's start with a basic theology of work.

1. God is a worker.

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth. ... <sup>2</sup>By the seventh day **God completed His work** which He had done, and **He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.** (Gen 1:1; 2:2)

<sup>17</sup>But He answered them, "**My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.**" (John 5:17)

2. God's design for mankind is work. Work for Adam and Eve and their progeny was God's plan from the beginning. Work is not a result of the fall.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them; and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28)

<sup>15</sup>Then the **LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.** (Gen 2:15)

3. The fall resulted in work being difficult and necessary for survival. Work has always been God's plan, but the fall resulted in the task of obtaining food being difficult.

<sup>17</sup>Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; **Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.** <sup>18</sup>"Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; <sup>19</sup>**By the sweat of your face You will eat bread,** Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." ... <sup>23</sup>therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, **to cultivate the ground** from which he was taken. (Gen 3:17-19; 23)

4. The primary purpose of our work should be to glorify God.

<sup>31</sup>Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.** (1 Cor 10:31)

5. A secondary purpose of work is to provide for our own needs and to have extra to share with others in need.

<sup>10</sup>For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: **if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.** (2 Thess 3:10)

<sup>8</sup>But **if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.** (1 Tim 5:9)

<sup>28</sup>He who steals must steal no longer; but rather **he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.** (Eph 4:28)

<sup>17</sup>Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup>**Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,** (1 Tim 6:17-18)

6. Work will never end. In heaven, we will continue to work even though there is no curse.

<sup>3</sup>**There will no longer be any curse;** and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and **His bond-servants will serve Him;** (Rev 22:3)

So, what should be do?

"First, just work hard. Go to work tomorrow or next month or next year and do your absolute best. Be the best employee, the best manager, the best associate you can be. Be known as the most honest, most humble, most ethical, most competent person in your field. And do all that not to advance your own career, but to advance God's fame. If you desperately want to see all of your co-workers saved, but you have a habit of not showing up to work on time, people will be annoyed and your witness will be compromised and God will not be honored. There are already enough people like that. Don't be one of them." (A Theology of Work by Bob Thune)

## ❖ How are you doing at work?

## Life in the all-sufficient Christ – Work Relationships (3:22-4:1)

### 1. Slaves (Employees/Subordinates) (3:22-25)

<sup>22</sup>Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

<sup>23</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

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<sup>22</sup>Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

<sup>23</sup>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>For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. (ESV)

### ❖ **Why do you think Paul spends 4 verses on slaves and 1 on masters? (1 Cor 1:26-31)**

#### The Analogy

This section in 3:18-4:1 is talking about fulfilling relational roles as the outflow of being filled with the Spirit. These are all relationships within the context of the family, the household – husband/wife, parent/child, and slave/master.

Slavery was a common institution in biblical times. Most businesses were family operated with the head of the household as the master and slaves as workers in the business. Slaves were members of the extended family household. Remember that “slave” (doulos) was the most servile person in the culture of Paul’s day. Slaves were workers in the family business and home – field workers, skilled and unskilled laborers, cooks, household managers, barbers, tutors/teachers, family physicians, etc. Their housing, food, clothing, and living expenses were provided (they were in essence “paid” for their service). In many ways slaves were better off than poor free people. Many commentators look at the positives of the slave system in the Roman empire and call it a decent system. However, slaves were owned. They were viewed as “tools” along with field beasts and fabricated tools. They were sometimes treated harshly physically. Depending on the master, it could be a miserable existence.

The head of the household was like the employer with the slave like the employee. Though obviously not exactly accurate, the analogy is reasonable in today’s modern, US society. It is much like our employee/employer or boss/worker relationship today. Besides the obvious difference of being owned and sometimes treated harshly, one major difference is, today, if you don’t like your boss/employer (master) you can find a different job and quit the difficult one.

This passage and others (1 Cor 7:17-24; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:5-9; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; Philemon; 1 Pet 2:18-20) provide a comprehensive picture of the believer’s responsibilities in the workplace. If believing employees followed these commands and principles, what a difference we would make in the workplace as we “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:9-10) so that “the name of God and *our* doctrine will not be spoken against” (1 Tim 6:1).

### The Command (3:22)

Slaves/employees are called to “obey” their master/employer. “Obey” is the same word used of the child’s responsibility to their parents. “Obey” means to hearken, to give respectful attention. It includes the idea of listening attentively, stillness, or attention. It conveys the meanings of calling for compliance (disposition to yield to another) with the demands or requests of another. It should be noted again that in the context of walking in the Spirit, this obedience comes from the heart that is surrendered to Christ and His word with a view to honoring Him. This is a pattern or lifestyle.

#### ❖ **How do you view your relationship to your employer?**

Slave/employees are to obey their masters “in all things” which is qualified with obeying the Lord first (Acts 5:29; Daniel 1 and 3).

“Masters on earth” is literally “according to the flesh masters” indicating that in the spiritual realm (i.e., the body of Christ, the church) the slave/master relationship is different. Within the body of Christ there is no distinction made due to social status (Col 3:11; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 3:26-28). For example, at work you may be the boss of an elder, but in the sphere of the body of Christ, the elder is to be submitted to and obeyed (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5).

It is interesting to note that the NT writers do not call believers to change the ills of fallen society. We are called to the singular purpose of the mission of making disciples. If the apostles had taught against the institution of slavery (or any other social evil), then people would have devoted themselves to a social cause and not the mission of disciple making. In addition, if there had been slave revolts they would have been viciously put down forever confusing the gospel of Christ for the forgiveness of sin with that of social change. The message of the gospel would have been clouded. Sound familiar?

#### ❖ **To what mission are you devoted?**

### The Method (3:22-23)

So how are believers to “obey” their master/employers?

First, is a negative, “not with external service”. “External service” is a compound word that is literally “eye slavery” and so the ESV translates it “eye-service”. This is working hard when the master/employer is watching but loafing when they are not. This is service rendered only for appearance sake, only when being scrutinized. This is a self-promoting, insincere attitude that is not present with Spirit-filled believers.

#### ❖ **Do you work the same (hopefully hard) regardless of who is watching?**

Second, is another negative, not as “pleasing men”. “Pleasing men” is again a compound word meaning literally “human being pleasing” and so the ESV translates it “people-pleasers”. The implication is of being in contrast to being a God-pleaser or at the sacrifice of some principle. These types of people act merely to please others. They sacrifice principle to please someone of superior authority. Again, this is an attitude and practice of deception that is not present with Spirit-filled believers.

#### ❖ **Do you maintain your integrity regardless who you are serving?**

Third, is with “sincerity of heart”. This is the contrast to the insincerity and external, shallow practice of eye-service and people-pleasing. The work of a slave/employee is to be accomplished with “sincerity of heart”. “Sincerity” means uprightness, mental honesty, the virtue of one who is free from pretense. It pertains to being motivated by singleness of purpose so as to be open and aboveboard, without guile, and without a hidden agenda. It has the idea of personal integrity expressed in word or action.

❖ **Do you have a hidden agenda of selfishness in your work?**

Forth, is “fearing the Lord”. “Fear” is in the present tense meaning it is to be a lifestyle. This is a reverential awe, a sense of fear of displeasing Him mixed with a sense of the reality that we will one day stand before and give an account.

❖ **Do you work with a sense of fear of displeasing Christ?**

Fifth, is the over-riding principle for Christian workers. “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.” Whatever work you do, do it with all your inner being, with all your effort. Not holding back your heart and soul. Do this for the Lord and not for people. If you are a slave/worker, then the truth is that your master/boss is Christ and not the master/boss. Always think that and with your entire inner being work.

❖ **In everything you do in your work, do you do it as if your boss was Christ?**

A passage that adds some characteristics of the godly slave/employee is in Titus.

<sup>9</sup>Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, <sup>10</sup>not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. (Titus 2:9-10)

“To be well-pleasing” means that which causes someone to be pleased. It is something which is well approved, eminently satisfactory, or extra-ordinarily pleasing. Believing slaves/employees are to be well-pleasing to their master/employers since they are serving the Lord.

❖ **Do you seek to please your boss in your work?**

“Not argumentative” means literally not speaking against, contradicting, disputing, refusing. Modern slang might say “not talking back”. Talking back, being contrary, speaking under one’s breath about and to the master/employer is not God’s will for Christian slaves/employees.

❖ **Do you control your words?**

“Not pilfering” means stealing in small quantities and implies stealing repeatedly in small amounts. Believing slave/employees should not steal from their master/employers in time or material.

❖ **Do you defraud your employer by stealing small quantities of time or material?**

“But showing all good faith” means to indicate or show faithfulness by word or act. The present tense indicates this should be their habitual practice. Believing slave/employees are trustworthy, reliable, and utterly dependable. They never give a reason for their loyalty to be doubted. They are continually proving themselves to be faithful servants in everything with which they are entrusted.

❖ **Are you trustworthy, reliable, and dependable?**

“So that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect”. “So that” expresses the purpose, aim, or goal of prior exhortations. “Adorn” means to put in order; decorate; embellish (to heighten the attractiveness of by adding decorative details). Believing slave/employees are to live out these truths with no exceptions (“in every respect”) before a watching world that is skeptical about the transforming power of the gospel.

❖ **Does your performance and behavior at work honor or dishonor Christ?**

A Spirit-filled slave/employee will fulfill his/her relational role in the workplace. This is a great barometer of your surrender-ness to Christ. If you see yourself not fulfilling this role, then you know you aren’t filled with the Spirit.

❖ **Does your work performance demonstrate Spirit-filling?**

The Reason (3:24-25)

There are two reasons given for the slave/employee to obey their master/employer.

First, because the Lord will reward their faithfulness. This we “know” with a lasting permanence beyond a shadow of a doubt. This knowledge sustains us in persevering in suffering and enduring unfairness against ourselves. We know that we will receive (fully what is one’s due) the reward of the inheritance of eternal life. There are many detailed aspects of the believer’s inheritance (Col 1:12), but the primary aspect is salvation (Heb 1:14), eternal life (Matt 19:29) – a quantity (forever in heaven) and quality of life (abundant life in Christ, John 15:10; Gal 2:20; 5:22-23). This is an amazing thought for slaves who could not “inherit” anything in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

The Lord will reward faithfulness. This Lord Christ is the one we serve (are continually a slave). We do not serve a master/employer. We serve the Lord Christ. “Lord Christ” is the only time used in Scripture. The word for “master” used in this passage is the same as “Lord”. So, the Spirit through Paul wants to contrast the “master on the earth” with the “Lord Messiah”. The Lord Christ is the one who rewards and the only One who the slave/employee is truly “slaving”.

❖ **Do you strive to be honoring to Christ and look forward to your reward?**

The negative reason for obeying is that the Lord will not protect you from the natural consequences of sin in the workplace. In fact, He will discipline you for wrongdoing. If you do wrong, you will receive the consequences for that wrong without partiality.

❖ **Do you view discipline for poor work performance or sin at work as God’s discipline?**

## 2. Masters (Employers/Bosses) (4:1)

<sup>1</sup>Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

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

Believing master/employers/bosses are commanded to “grant to their slaves/employees justice and fairness”. Remember, this flows out of walking in the Spirit.

### ❖ **If you are in a position of authority in the workplace, do you view fulfilling that role as an outflow of walking in the Spirit?**

“Grant” means to cause something to happen to someone and is a continual command that could be translated “continually render on your part”. The Spirit-filled master/boss will continually grant to their slave/employees justice and fairness regardless of the slave/worker behavior or performance. A slave/worker who meets or exceeds reasonable expectations should be granted justice and fairness the same as a slave/worker who fails to meet reasonable expectations.

### ❖ **Do you fulfill your role independent of those you lead?**

“Justice” means what is right, what is in accordance with God’s commands in His word. The believing master/boss will live out the Scripture’s precepts and principles towards the slave/worker.

“Fairness” means fair and equal. There is much discussion on what “equal” means. Based on context and a harmony of other passages, this is not equality of societal position. The context provides the answer. These commands are to be carried out knowing that master/bosses have a Master themselves, a Master in heaven. Their Master is does not call sin anything other than sin but is also longsuffering and gentle. That is how the Lord is toward each of His children, so that is how believing master/boss should be toward their slave/employees. The master/boss should treat their slave/employees how Christ treats them, otherwise how could the master/boss answer when called to account for their severe treatment of their slave/worker.

<sup>13</sup>“If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves When they filed a complaint against me, <sup>14</sup>What then could I do when God arises? And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him? (Job 31:13-40)

### ❖ **Are you able to give a good account of your treatment of workers?**

## Conclusion

Work can be difficult whether boss or worker. Yet with the Lord’s strength it is possible to fulfill those roles in a way that honors Him. Both boss and worker must walk in the Spirit to find this strength since being filled with the Spirit (making the words of Christ to richly dwell within you) produces manifold blessings – observable, tangible supernatural character and strength.

### **Additional Study**

1. How does knowing that God called for work before Adam sinned change the way you view work?
2. Do you use work as a means to demonstrate your connectedness to Christ?
3. If you really believe that you are working for God and not man, how does that change your attitudes and actions at work?
4. Take a moment to pray for your boss, your employees, and fellow workers and your effect upon them as you work.