



Essentials.... Over the next 6 weeks, as we move through Colossians 4, we’re going to talk about the “Essentials” of the Christian Life. We’re going to talk about how we are to use our Time, how we are to talk to one another, how we are to share our burdens, and about that absolute importance of having Christian friends in our lives. You don’t want to miss a single Sunday...

And so, today we’re going to begin with the essential of work...

We all have to work...in fact, the truth is...sometimes we feel almost chained to our jobs and the requirements of work. Work occupies so much of our time and the truth is...we typically spend more of the waking hours of our day with the people we work with than our own families... So, this idea of work and feeling tied to it or chained to it is something that’s very important to discuss.

Now the passage we’re going to read is usually taught as a way of looking at our jobs and our bosses...employees and employers and I would say that application is true...but, today we’re going to see what I believe is an even greater application. Let’s read the passage together...

Colossians 3:22-4:1

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. ¹ Masters, treat your bondservants^[a] justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

I’m holding the chain again...what do you think of when you see a human being holding a chain? Perhaps slavery? Perhaps. Seeing a chain often brings thoughts of being held in bondage or captivity. Chains are strong...hard to break...they seem impervious... Yes, chains bring to our minds the thoughts of slavery.

Slavery...they had it in the first century. It was a well-established institution in the Roman Empire. Scholars tell us there were at least 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire in the first century. That

was about 1 out of every 5 people. And get this...in the country of Italy, about 1 out of every 3 people were in slavery.

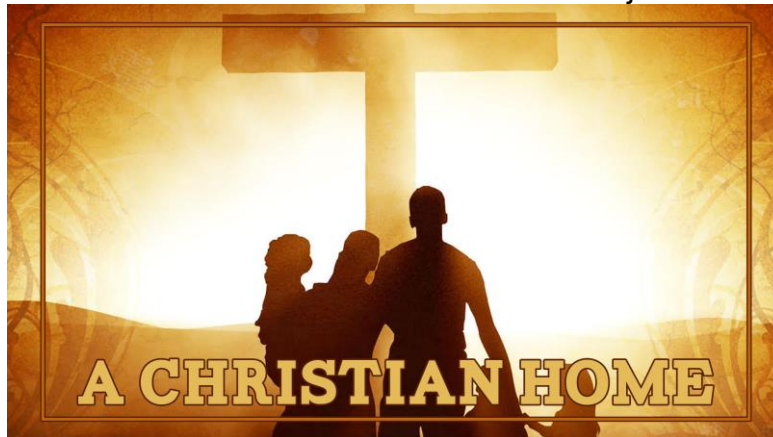
Now we mustn't think of slavery for the 1st century like we do here in the United States with what happened here that led to the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Yes, slavery in this country was by and large based on race, but that wasn't the case in the Roman Empire in the 1st century.

Again, slavery in the first century was common. If you couldn't pay a bill, you could put yourself into servitude to the person you owed, to pay it off. This happened a lot. Slave labor was used in all areas of Roman life except public office. Slaves were often mixed in with "free" laborers as employers used whatever human resources were available and necessary to get a job done.

Interestingly, many of the slaves in the Roman Empire were very educated and that's because the more education you had, the better it was for the Master in his business/economy. Slaves were given great responsibility. There were men who were slaves who worked as doctors, lawyers, teachers, architects, engineers. They worked for wealthy men who managed large groups of people and literally ran cities and towns with "slave labor."

Again, this is hard for us to think about. We think of slaves in the 1800's in chains and working in cotton fields and factories...being beaten and treated terribly. But, even in America...not all slaves were treated in deplorable ways. It depended on the owner.

Now, let's think about where we are in Colossians. What have we just finished talking about?



A Christian home, right? We've talked about mutual submission between wives and husbands, we've talked about "children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right," and so, this topic fits perfectly...IT'S MORE OBEDIENCE. The husbands and wives needed to know how to treat each other and so did the families...children obeying their parents. And so, here we have more submission, more humility, more obedience...

Colossians 3:22

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.

Now some see this passage and argue, "Why didn't Paul, or even Jesus, try to stop slavery while they were here on the earth?" Some say that it looks like Paul is condoning slavery by what he says in verse 22. Listen, first of all, please be reminded, this is God's Word. The Word of God was inspired by the Holy Spirit and Paul wrote down what he was carried along by the Holy Spirit to

write down. Never forget, when you read the Bible, you're reading God's Word, not man's word. Our authority comes from God, not man.

Listen, it wasn't Paul's job to eradicate slavery. It was his job to teach and preach Christ and Him crucified, raised from the dead and alive. It was the job of Christians to lift up Jesus, not a social cause. Bible Commentator Warren Wiersbe says this:

“While it is good and right for Christians to get involved in the promotion of honesty and morality in government and society, this concern must never replace the mandate to go into all the world and preach the Gospel.” Warren Wiersbe, Bible Commentator

Again...this is important to grasp in its fullness: Christians in the first century had no power. They were seen at best as a sect of Judaism (which the Jews hated) and it worst, they were eventually seen as an unlawful group who were only worthy to be fed to lions in the Roman Coliseum. They had no power to change anything. In no way, shape or form, was Jesus, or the Apostle Paul condoning slavery, just because they didn't call for the abolition of it. Eventually, Christianity and the love for your neighbor would take hold and through the centuries, slavery would be abolished. But, in the first century, slavery was as common as McDonald's are today. They were everywhere.

You see, the exhortation being given here at the end of Colossians 3 was in and of itself, revolutionary for its time, because it provided unparalleled dignity to slaves and a new paradigm for masters who had slaves...they were to be kind and caring to them.

In fact, on Worship Wednesday coming up on March 4th, were going to talk about a runaway slave named Onesimus and his slave owner, Philemon. In fact, Onesimus helped to carry this this letter to the Colossian church. Yes, Philemon was a Master, who lived in Colossae and we have a letter by his name in our Bibles addressed to him...a letter from Paul to a slave owner. A letter about forgiveness. It's going to be a powerful service on March 4th...I hope you'll make plans to come.

Commentator John Stott says this:

“While we cannot defend the indolence or cowardice of...Christian centuries which saw this social evil, but failed to eradicate it; we can at the same time rejoice that the Gospel immediately began, even in the first century, to undermine the institution. It lit a fuse which at long last led to the explosion which destroyed it!” John Stott, Bible Commentator

Eventually slavery would be destroyed in many places in the world...Europe with William Wilberforce and United States with Abraham Lincoln...but, slavery still exists. Hey church, could it be that one day Christians could be enslaved again? I pray not...but, if it ever happens, we have this Scripture to guide us...

Colossians 3:22

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.

That phrase, “eye-service” was specific to the Apostle Paul to this passage. Nowhere else is it used in the NT. Eye-service means you only work when the boss is watching you. That's wrong. That's being a people-pleaser. We're to work whether or not the boss is watching or not. We are to work with “sincerity of heart.” In the Greek that phrase means: “from the soul with enthusiasm.” That means: in your soul, you want to do a good job. Is that you? Do you have to be watched to work? Young person, child...do you only work when mom and dad are watching?

That last phrase says, “fearing the Lord.” That means, He’s the One who is always watching. We never escape His love, nor His watching eye. Listen, no matter what our lot in life is...we are to look to the Lord and work as “unto Him.” See it...

Colossians 3:23

²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

We ultimately work for Jesus...never, EVER forget that. I used to have a bumper sticker that said this:



What does that mean? A Jewish Carpenter? ☺ My ULTIMATE BOSS is Jesus! And if you are a follower of His...so is yours!

What is your work like? Your school situation, college, high school, middle school? You know we all have people in our lives who are hard to get along with... If they happen to be your boss or a supervisor or a teacher, it makes it hard. I had a boss one time who wanted me to lie and punch in a number that would make the company I worked for look better to the bank. I refused...I told him as a believer and follower of Christ, I couldn't do that. He asked me to go home and think about it. I told Pam that night, I'd probably be looking for a job...but, the next day...he told me had plugged the number himself.

It was then that I started looking for another job. I didn't want to work for a man or a company with that kind of leadership. I knew the Lord would provide for me. My boss is a Jewish carpenter! We are to work heartily (with enthusiasm) for the Lord, not for man. Why? Because we'll be rewarded!

Colossians 3:24

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

What is our inheritance? Our salvation that will be fully experienced in heaven. This is not our home folks... No matter what the circumstances, how pleasant or unpleasant they are...we are just pilgrims passing through. As the old song says, “There’s a Payday Someday!”

No, you may not be getting your due now; you may be underpaid and overworked; but some day God is going to give you your just reward. As an employee on the job, as a student, , whatever it is, wherever you're working, whatever you're doing, don't let the inequities, the difficulties, the unfairness, dictate your behavior, you keep working hard and you look over that unfair boss or

teacher's shoulder and see Jesus and smile...because He's who you're working for! You serve all-out, you serve with total commitment, because the Lord is the One you're really serving, and He will reward you one day in heaven.

You say, "That's not fair!" I get your sentiment...but there's payday for the wrongdoer too...

Colossians 3:25

²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

God is impartial. There are consequences for all who do wrong...no matter who they think they are. There is a payday someday.

And now a word to the Masters. Colossians 4:1. (Really, this verse ought to be attached as the last verse to chapter 3.) Remember, the chapters and verses weren't added to until the 1500's.

Colossians 4:1

¹ Masters, treat your bondservants^[a] justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Listen, if you're position of authority over someone, treat them fairly. Be kind. Do unto them as you would have them do to you or someone in your family. Don't have one set of rules for one group that works for you and another set for another group. That breeds animosity. Be just...be fair. Be kind. Be thankful. Thank people for what they do. If they do a good job, "Tell them." If they're not...be kind enough, to tell them that too. It's a kind thing to help someone who is struggling.

Why do we do this? See the last part of the verse:

Colossians 4:1b

...knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

See this chain. I'm a slave. I'm a slave to Jesus. He's my Master and I've chosen to be His slave. You see, the word, "bondservant," is a special word in Scripture. It's when a slave has been set free, but he/she chooses to stay with the Master. They take their earlobe, stick it against a door post and drive an awl (large nail) through their lobe and take the signet ring of the Master, so that everyone can look and see who they belong to. And that they belong to them willingly.

Jesus bought me...at a price...

1 Corinthians 6:20

²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

It's been said that *every human is a slave to something*, and the way you can tell that is by what consumes that person's thoughts, desires...it's what they can't get enough of. What is that or who is that for you? What is that you're CHAINED TO? What dominates your life?

Yes, we're all slaves to something...or someone. And it's interesting...in our culture, that the people who claim to be the "most-free" are the ones who are most often the most enslaved to their lifestyle. Who is the authority in your life? What are you chained to? Who or what owns you? For some it's their job, their kids, their careers, a hobby, a sinful lifestyle.

Jesus came to this earth to be treated worse than a slave, so that He could take the slaves of this world and remake them into royalty! I AM A BONDSERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST! HE IS MY MASTER AND I WILLINGLY SERVE HIM WITH MY WHOLE HEART and that means I AM FREE! I am...to be chained to Jesus is to be free, but to be chained to anyone or anything else is, is to be a slave and in bondage and that person knows nothing of true freedom. Jesus said in John 8:32, "...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."