

## Lesson 13

# Work Heartily – As to the Lord

Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism. Masters, deal with your slaves justly and fairly, since you know that you too have a Master in heaven, Colossians 3.22-4.1.

## Introduction

Beginning with Colossians 3.22 and continuing through 4.6, Paul addresses Christian relationships with those outside the family. In all these experiences, the driving force is Christ. As mentioned in Colossians 3.17, Christians *do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*. No matter what status we find ourselves in life, our Lord is at the forefront. In serving one's master, the slave would be expected to ask, "What would Jesus do here?" "Is my service to my master something I engage in without compromising my influence for Christ?" "Will my behavior bring glory to God, and can I live all my life with a sense of gratitude and thankfulness for the opportunity of doing it?" These are the guiding principles that are to govern our life ... Jesus is to shape any and every relationship we find ourselves in. We have given our lives into submission to Him. He has the supreme authority over our life.

The beauty of this passage (and its companion in Ephesians 6.5-9) is that God is completely impartial. God does not care about the social position of the master or the slave. The cross has made every person equal and challenges them to live a new life looking forward to *an inheritance from the Lord*, 3.24. A few paragraphs before, Paul writes:

In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all, Colossians 3.11.

This is the beauty of Christianity. The most important thing is to live in a godly manner that brings glory to Christ no matter the circumstance. Today, the application for these verses fits well inside the relationship between an employer and his employees. How should we conduct ourselves inside this relationship?

A tragedy of our time is how the basic principles of respect and recognizing the authority of others over us is ignored. At all levels of employment ... from the one who performs menial tasks to the executive level ... many engage much of their time in gossip and malicious talk about those who are over them and only work when the boss is near. Many productive hours are lost to wasted time on the internet, standing around, or idle talk. Required tasks deemed unimportant can be ignored. Scheduled work hours are called off for dishonest reasons. When I worked for a large retailer during my undergrad years, some of my fellow co-workers would hide in the stockroom to avoid doing work. My understanding is that things are much worse today than three decades ago. More and more I hear employers talk about how it is hard to find reliable, trustworthy workers who demonstrate integrity and character.

Shame on us. We must do better with subsequent generations in making sure these principles are engrained in our young people. We have much work to do.

## Do Your Work from the Heart – Fearing the Lord

Notice as you read verse 22, how Paul calls for genuine service and obedience to those who have authority over us. We obey them *in everything*, no matter whether the responsibility is something we enjoy or something we dislike. When assigned a task, we are to give ourselves *wholeheartedly* to it, 3.22c. It does not matter if we think it is unnecessary, ridiculous, or silly. We agreed when we went to work to fulfill the responsibilities of the job.

The Christian is someone who gives himself or herself totally to the task – *all the time* - not just doing the minimum to avoid a write up or other disciplinary actions, 3.22b. Our work is not just about what we want our employer to see. Our work is about what the Lord sees . . . which includes our motives and thoughts. If we are a mere people-pleaser, not only are we disrespecting our boss, more importantly, we are demonstrating no reverence for the Lord who has called us to an authentic display of Christian virtues. We are to serve our employer *from the heart*, 3.23a. We are to work this way no matter if our boss is two-faced, dishonest, regards us as nothing, or flat-out evil. Why is this so?

## We Work for the Lord, Not for People

Lenski adequately captures the essence of Paul's writing in his comments when he says, *throw your soul into the word as if your one employer were the Lord!*<sup>45</sup> Why is this so important to keep in mind? First, we work, *fearing the Lord*, 3.22d. It's not just about our self-preservation or interests, we work with the understanding that we will answer to Him on the last day for all we have done or said.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your consciences, 2 Corinthians 5.11-12.

The apostles taught that God expects obedience in all things . . . whether good or not so good. Why this is needful brings up the second point we need to keep in mind.

How we work lets other people in on how serious we are about the practice of Christianity.

At work, do I adorn Christ in everything?

Slaves are to submit to their masters in everything, and to be well-pleasing, not talking back or stealing, but demonstrating utter faithfulness, so that they may adorn the teaching of God our Savior in everything, Titus 29-10.

At work, do I honor my boss as worthy of respect? If I do not, do I realize how my attitude reflects on Jesus Christ?

All who are under the yoke as slaves should regard their own masters as worthy of all respect, so that God's name and his teaching will not be blasphemed. Let those who have believing masters not be disrespectful to them

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<sup>45</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*. Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937, p. 184.

because they are brothers, but serve them even better, since those who benefit from their service are believers and dearly loved. Teach and encourage these things, 1 Timothy 6.1-2.

At work, am I following in the steps of Christ ... even if I am being treated unfairly?

Household slaves, submit to your masters with all reverence not only to the good and gentle ones but also to the cruel. For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God. For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps, 1 Peter 2.18-21.

God calls us to be obedient to Him in all things.

## We Work Toward an Inheritance from the Lord

Sometimes it is easy to become cynical. Our minds tell us that if we left our job tomorrow that there would be someone to fill our shoes the next day and the company would go on like we were never there. And on its most basic level that is true. But this is never an excuse to back off on our responsibility. The Christian works for others knowing that even if he or she does not receive a reward here for their service, they trust that God will repay them for their faithfulness, 3.24a. *The dead will be judged according to their works by what is written in the books*, Revelation 20.12-13. Whatever a believer does for the Savior here on earth will never be regretted. So as an employee, we must always keep in mind it is the Lord Jesus Christ we serve, 3.24b. We can trust in His reward. See Luke 19.11-27; James 1.12; and 2 Timothy 4.7-8. The question is, will we keep our mind elevated on the spiritual – even as we must trudge through in patience with the day-to-day grind of work? *Set your mind on the Lord*, Colossians 3.2!

If we do wrong, there will be consequences, 3.25. We will reap what we sow, Galatians 6.7. Ultimately when final judgment comes, there will be no favoritism with God. If we treat others wrongly, we should fear. If we have been treated wrongly, we should trust that God will make all things right.

## A Word to Employers

The bulk of Paul's instructions in Colossians have to do with the slave (employee in today's application). First, let's think about the historical perspective of the first century and how revolutionary Paul's words would be. Slaves were also human beings with fundamental rights. This would have been extraordinary and really have caught the attention of his audience.

Now, let's make the application to today. Employers, how should you treat your employees? Paul says to treat them *justly* and *fairly*. The implication in the second part of the verse is that God will judge those who mistreat those under them. When dealing with an employee, one must ask, how would Jesus desire that I treat them? Employers are themselves slaves of the one Master, Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

In whatever role a Christian finds himself or herself ... at home or at work ... life must be lived *for the Lord* and in harmony with those around. Taking the principle of Ephesians 5.21 into consideration, we *submit to everyone out of reverence for Christ*. How effective are you in recognizing His authority *and* the authority of others who have been placed over you?

## For Thought and Reflection

1. How do the principles of Colossians 3.17 fit into what Paul expresses in Colossians 3.22-4.1?
2. On what basis are all Christians equal? Does God have regard for social/economic status? Explain. How does this understanding help us to look at one another in Christ, and all humans for that matter?
3. In what things are we to obey those who have authority over us? Is how we feel about what is expected of us something that matters?
4. What type of consistency is expected out of the way we work? What type of attitude does God want? Explain.
5. To whom do we work for?
6. Why do we serve Him *out of fear*?
7. What can we expect for faithful service?
8. In what way should an employer treat his employees?