

WORK UNTO CHRIST OR WITHER UNTO SELF

Colossians 3:23-4:1 • FCBC • 09/04/22

Good morning church, it is a privilege to be with you this morning worshipping with you. If you are visiting with us for the first time this morning my name is Ryan and I am one of the elders and Worship Pastor here and have the privilege of opening up the Word to us this morning.

Just briefly before we begin, I wanted to share what a sweet evening service we had last Sunday! I think we had 11 or 12 people get baptized. 11 or 12 testimonies that God is not done saving souls and building His kingdom. We are going to be able to do that again on September 25th as we have another full service of people to baptize and would encourage you to come out for that, we'll have more details on that later.

We are closing out chapter three of this book and starting chapter 4 which is our last chapter in the book of Colossians. After this morning we only have 3 Sundays left in this book. **I don't know about you but I've needed this book this summer.** Let's just look back at some of the things we've been reminded of in the book of Colossians:

- In Colossians 1 we looked at the Preeminent Kingship of Christ!
 - If Jesus is who He says He is (and be sure He is) then that directs what we ought to be praying for towards ourselves and one and another
 - It means Jesus is enough and proved that through his life, death, burial, and resurrection.
 - And that is good news because it also reveals that we aren't enough in and of ourselves but that we needed a perfect prophet, priest, and king to die on our behalf and give us His life, His righteousness so that we could stand qualified and acceptable before God! And because of that reality we see that our great hope is Christ in us, our hope in glory and infinite treasure.
- In Colossians 2 we see that these truths reveal that **WE** as in the **COLLECTIVE WE** here in this local body and in the church at large are **ROOTED** in Christ having our faith **ESTABLISHED** in Him!
 - This means that we look to Jesus and to him alone for our hope and eternal security
 - That it's, not Jesus + circumcision, asceticism (aka self discipline and avoidance of all pleasure for the sake of earning favor with God), rules, or any other additions. Rather simply Jesus because He is the substance of our life and faith. Not the shadow but the actual treasure itself.
 - Therefore we're captive to Christ alone; we've received Him so we therefore walk in Him and have our life and being in Him.
- And in Colossians 3 Paul says "If all of this is true of you. If you've died with Christ and have been raised with Christ, then live a life that looks like that's true of you."
 - He says, to put off the old nature; sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness (which is Idolatry), anger, wrath, malice, slander, lying,

gossip, and every part of your old nature that tries to claw its way back into your life and living

- And why????
 - Because you have Christ after all
 - You are free and no longer a slave to sins dominion
 - Paul gets to verse 10 of chapter 3 and makes this summary doxology statement through verse 17 saying you can put off the old self *“and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all (Jesus Christ is King over all... So do this). ¹² Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
- I mean we could just wrap up and pray right there... but we won’t.
- Because Paul goes on to say and here is a practical way you can practice all of these things; in the home with the family the way that God designed it to be.
 - And last week Josiah showed us that God is a great and good and grand designer who’s ways and order in our homes and families are good
 - We saw that our obedience to God’s ways isn’t a chore to be belabored but a way of living to be enjoyed!
 - When we are putting to death the old nature in Christ and putting on the new self with all of its characteristics then husbands will be loving and leading their wives and wives will be joyfully submitted to their husbands love and leadership. Fathers won’t be provoking their children in anger and children will be obeying their parents because their parents will be encouraging them to obey, not for their own sake and ease, but because it pleases the Lord and they will be teaching their children that it is good to live a life that pleases the Lord!
 - Josiah even walked us through the relationship of a servant, or bond servant, or slave to their master and how the new nature affects even that relationship

And so, we pick up, right in the middle of Paul’s thought process here as he gives his summary thoughts on the practical outworking of all this and Lord willing we are going to look at why we either:

- WORK UNTO CHRIST OR WITHER UNTO SELF
- So we pick it up in verse 23 where Paul says, ²³ *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men*

This morning as we come to this passage we can't divorce this from the previous verse. This verse was set in a context and Josiah did a great job giving us a bit of that context last week regarding slavery, servanthood, and bond-servanthood. I want to touch on that a little more as it will help us and I'd say even spur us on in a greater way in understanding our own attitude to our calling and new nature.

- As we consider this passage in light of Paul speaking to servants or depending on your translation, slaves (which is probably even a better translation of the Greek word *doulos*) and their masters; I'd imagine we come to a few questions here:
 - What does this have to do with me? If this is about how to endure under slavery then why does this passage matter to me in 2022 Boise Idaho?
 - As far as I know there aren't any slaves or slave masters here at least I'd hope not so how do I appropriately apply this to my life?
 - And If I'm honest, perhaps when we've heard this passage expounded on before it's just a trite sort of cliché way to say work hard and don't complain. And while we can certainly draw that from the text, that honestly doesn't do it justice as it pertains to our hearts and attitudes and position in Christ!
 - You may also be wondering why Paul doesn't just go on the attack to correct the social injustice of slavery right here right now!?
 - By telling servants to work hard under their masters and telling masters (as we'll see here in a bit) to treat their servants or their slaves with dignity and honor, and kindness doesn't he in fact reinforce a terrible social construct?
 - Well as Josiah alluded to last week, we have to be very careful not to impose what our understanding of 19th century American slavery on the text and with what is going on here.
 - There are categorical differences between what we know of slavery and what the institution of slavery was here.
 - Now, that is not to say that Roman slavery was an easy life and an acceptable means of a social construct in its time and place
 - But it's also not synonymous with what we think of as the sinful horrors of primarily race based driven 19th century American slavery
 - As Josiah alluded to last week there were estimated some 20 to 60 million slaves within the Roman empire which is equivalent to 1/3 to a 1/2 of the population
 - A vast majority of these slaves were the result of war, poverty, or generational repetition. Believe it or not, in the 1st century a large, estimated sum of Roman inhabitants sold themselves into slavery because of economic hardship

- Also, different from our 19th century slave condition, manumission (or the release of slaves) was often available to and acted upon by those under urban or rural Roman slavery either through exemplary service or by eventually buying their own freedom.
 - There is a fascinating read published by Stanford University in the “Princeton/Stanford Classics on *the culture, realities, and social constructs of ancient Roman slavery and economics*, if you are interested in looking into this more, but suffice it to say this was a very true reality in ancient Roman Empire
 - Now all that to say it is also important that we clearly see and understand that Paul wasn’t endorsing this social construct either. Nowhere in this passage is Paul endorsing or celebrating these harsh realities.
 - We understand as well as Paul did that all of this is a result of the fall. War, poverty, people owning people, none of this was God’s original design or order which is why what Paul is doing here is so important.
 - Instead of trying to uproot and revolt against this broken social structure, he looks at the believers in Colossae and says, “You have a new king, a new kingdom” and he takes this context in which the Christian slaves and slaveowners found themselves in and gives it an injection of Gospel Culture.
 - He teaches these people how to live in this larger social order as brothers and sisters in Christ
 - As one commentator, William Hendiksen, said:
 - “As we see here, Paul did not recommend outright revolt by the slaves against their masters. On the contrary, he took the social structure as he found it and endeavored by peaceful means to change it into the very opposite. His rule in summary amounted to this, ‘Let the slave whole-heartedly obey his master, and let the master be kind to his slave.’ Thus the ill-will, dishonesty, and laziness of the slave would be replaced by willing service, integrity, and industry; the cruelty and brutality of the master, by considerateness and love to the slave. And a new and gloriously transformed society would replace the old.”
 - But it still begs the question, why would the slave and slave master submit to this sort of holistic change?
 - And here we can begin drawing some parallel lines back to our own lives
 - And is this not the very question that faces us day in and day out of our lives? Why would we submit to the change of the gospel in our lives and living?
 - Why endure a difficult work situation? Why endure a difficult church situation? Why endure a difficult relationship? Why endure under suffering? Or here’s a good one, why endure injustice when I feel like I’ve been wronged but done nothing wrong?
 - What we’re ultimately asking is why spend my life and work unto Christ!?

- Or the author of Hebrews in chapter 10 writing to those wanting to shrink back in their endurance in the gospel and under persecution says in verses 34-36, *For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.* ³⁵ *Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.* ³⁶ *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised*
 - Listen church, hope deferred makes the heart sick Proverbs 13, so to tell a bunch of slaves to work heartily for their masters as unto the Lord and to tell their Masters to treat their slaves in a counter cultural way without any hope that it will pay off in the end is a death sentence to the soul
 - But that's not the case here, is it! Paul says work heartily as unto the Lord knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance of your reward
 - And what is that inheritance!?
 - It's the promise of God to His children that they will receive Christ forever and in Christ are heirs to everything Christ is an heir to!
 - Romans 8:16-17, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
 - Listen to the reward of our inheritance this way from a conference in Alabama and imagine he's speaking to us here in Boise (play clip)
 - The hope of that reality is being kept for us right now as Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3-4, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you*
 - We work heartily as unto Christ because it is Christ who has earned for us the reward of living and dying!
 - Our hope is not deferred, it is promised in the reward of our inheritance as Paul says here in verse 24
 - Do you believe that when you go about your day, your duties, your work, your ministries, your families? Do I believe that? Or have we stopped believing this somewhere down the line as it reflects in our attitudes towards God and one another?
- Secondly, we work heartily as unto Christ because: CHRIST IS THE LORD

- Look at the last part of verse 24
- If we aren't careful we might read right over it but Paul deems it important enough to emphasize "You are serving the LORD Christ!" As if to say you are serving the true Master, the Master of Masters.
- Christ must be the Lord of Lords and King of Kings in order to make good on the promise of our inheritance and that's exactly what Paul is getting at, not just in the statement here in verse 24 but throughout the book of Colossians!
 - Over and over He's written of the preeminence of Christ, the Lordship of Christ, fact that all things were created in Him and through Him, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities, everything is subject to Christ and His Lordship including AND ESPECIALLY our hearts and attitudes in all that we say and do!
- When we act, whether that is in our vocations or whatever circumstance the Lord has us in are we acting under the reality that Christ is the Lord and we are ultimately subject to Him and His plan?
 - Oh man we love the providence and hand of God when it prospers us but do we love it when our circumstances are less than ideal?
 - Here in this circumstance that Paul is addressing he's telling slaves to obey their masters because in doing so ultimately, they are obeying him! That's great when the master is kind and benevolent but what about when the master isn't operating under the same pretense as the slave?
 - We love to serve Christ and submit ourselves to his Lordship when work is going well, church is going well, marriage and family is going well, but is He Lord when things get difficult?
 - You see this is explicitly Christian as well, we operate differently from the world because we answer to someone way outside of ourselves! One who transcends our circumstances and gives us the hope and promise of a reward! We serve Christ the Lord ultimately, not earthly Lords!
 - Have you submitted to the reality that Paul has painted for us in the book of Colossians that Christ indeed is the Lord and therefore worthy of your life and living in all that you say and do regardless of the circumstance you find yourself in TODAY?
- And church this is really good news for us, because if Christ is the Lord (and you can be sure He is) than that means he is perfectly just in all that he says and does towards you. Our final reason to work heartily as unto the Lord is this: CHRIST IS JUST
 - Look at verses 25-4:1 (read)
 - So often our biggest hurdle in working heartily as unto the Lord is believing that he is actually just, especially when the circumstances of our life seem to preach a different story.
 - But here-in lies the hope of Paul's final sentiment to these slaves and slave masters:

- He says not only will Christ reward you, not only is He Lord and therefore can make good on the promise of your inheritance, He will also make all things right in the end.
- There truly will be justice
- He will reconcile all accounts and make right what was wrong and distorted in the fall!
 - This is not a new concept at this point in scripture. Abraham interceding for Sodom back in Genesis 18 calls out in verse 25 on the character of God saying, *“Will not the judge of the whole earth do what is just?”*
 - Or the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:3-4, *“For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! ⁴“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.*
 - Or the prophet Isaiah after warning a rebellious people in chapter 30 says of God in verse 18: *“Therefore, the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.”*
 - Or the Psalmist in Psalm 9:7-8, *“But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, ⁸and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.”*
- The reality that God is a just God and shows no partiality is why Paul can exhort the saints in Rome to not act vindictively because the Lord will vindicate those he loves:
 - This is Romans 12:19, *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”*
- This is why Paul encourages the slaves he’s writing to, obey your earthly masters even when it’s difficult even if they treat you unfairly because the ultimate master of your masters is Christ himself who will repay
- Oh and masters treat your slaves justly and fairly in love even if they aren’t performing to your standards because remember you have a master in heaven whom you work for!
- This entire concept ought to be good enough for us because as we read earlier it was good enough for Christ himself!
 - Remember 1 Peter 2: Christ himself suffered working heartily as unto the Lord His father leaving us an example who, *“When he was reviled, he did not revile in return;*

when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

- Listen church if Christ can entrust himself to God, can't we!?

Do you see it now!? This whole system of living Paul builds off of in Colossians 3:17 where he tells husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, slaves, masters to do everything whether in word or deed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him because your life is no longer only horizontal but it's vertical with horizontal implications! In other words, love Christ, love others, and do it for Christ because you belong to him now!

- As Martin Luther so famously said, "God doesn't need your good works but your neighbor does." As does your wife, your children, your employee, your employer, your fellow church members, your in laws, grandparents and on and on. Period. Hard stop. This isn't conditional. It's not so long as this person, this friend, this pastor, this elder, this co-worker, this human, keeps up their end of the bargain.
- NO! That's working heartily as unto men which is really working heartily unto self and your own kingdom and you will wither

Do want a litmus test for how you know you are working heartily as unto Christ or withering unto self?

- Ask yourself this question: do the circumstances of my life dictate the attitude of my heart? If so you may be in danger of withering unto self.
- Listen we all go through difficult seasons of life. Seasons of heartache where we are naturally frustrated at where we find ourselves.
 - I'm frustrated in my marriage, I'm frustrated in my parenting, I'm frustrated with my church, I'm frustrated in my job, I'm frustrated in my place in this world.
 - That's understandable, but what do you do with that frustration!? Do you let it make you bitter, sad, and miserable? If so you might be withering unto self!
 - But guess what, I've got great news for you this morning, if you confess your sins, your heart attitude, your unbelief, He (Christ) is willing, wanting, and able to forgive you of that sin and to cleanse you of all unrighteousness!
 - Run to Jesus, leave your withering, and work heartily as Unto Christ and watch it produce joy in you that says,
 - Christ is my reward, I have nothing to lose and everything to gain
 - Christ is Lord, I have a good and gracious King that I can trust
 - Christ is just, will He not do what is right, what can man, circumstance, or this world do unto me!!!!

Church may this passage help us as Christians live in the world that is (a world Christ has redeemed and is redeeming through the gospel) so that we can look forward to the world to come where the kingdom is consummated and Christ steps on the earth to reign as King once and for all! This is what Christianity is, do you love it!? Do you actually love Jesus!? May it show in all we do being unto Christ and Him alone as we die to self and live to His glory! Let's pray.