

**Series:** *Colossians: The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ*  
**Part 2:** *Living out the Sufficiency of Christ (chapters 3-4)*  
**Lesson:** *All Wrapped Up In Jesus, Part 5 – Our Employment*  
**Text:** Colossians 3:22-4:1 (L13)  
**Date:** Sunday, April 15, 2012

Colonial Hills  
Baptist Church

### Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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#### TEACHING TIP

Teachers are encouraged to personalize the lesson by adding in their own illustrations and applications. Perhaps a personal story from work or a transparent testimony of application will open up some discussion or drive a point home even deeper.

#### NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Colossians 4:2-6 – *All Wrapped up in Jesus, Part 6 – Our Community Involvement*

#### INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to note that Paul deals with the master/slave relationship in the home with more detail than he does any other relationship (e.g., husband/wife, parent/child).<sup>1</sup> Had Paul wanted to undermine the institution of slavery or encourage its abolition, this certainly seems like an appropriate place for him to do that. While it is true that such instigation “would have caused significant difficulty in the first-century setting, and undue persecution would result,”<sup>2</sup> that does not seem to be Paul’s reason for avoiding such encouragement. Paul simply seems uninterested in even getting the ball rolling on abolition.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, we may go too far or at least mis-state the point to conclude that God’s Word “does recognize [slavery] as an element of society that could be beneficial if both slaves and masters treated each other as they should.”<sup>4</sup>

While much could be said about slavery both from Scripture’s teaching and from its silence, we can at least agree that “far from seeking to abolish slavery, the Lord and the apostles use it as a motif for spiritual instruction, by likening

<sup>1</sup>This is most likely because the former runaway, now born-again slave Onesimus was from Colossae and the church there had been impacted by his story—that is, both slaves and masters were probably now questioning what was the right thinking regarding the institution of slavery.

<sup>2</sup>Melick, Richard R. Vol. 32, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Electronic Ed., Logos Library System, in *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001. P. 316.

<sup>3</sup>Paul seems more interested in a spiritual abolition of slavery, through which the individual members of the church recognize their equality “in Christ” (cf. 3:11; 4:9). Regarding physical slavery even within the church, notice what Paul writes in I Timothy 6:2-4. However, the principles that Paul teaches here and elsewhere “eventually caused the slave system to die wherever Christianity went” (Kent, Homer A. Jr. *Studies in Treasures of Wisdom: Colossians and Philemon*, Revised Ed. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1978. P. 148.).

<sup>4</sup>MacArthur, John. *Colossians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996. P. 172.

the believer, one who belongs to Christ and serves Him, to a slave. So New Testament literature accepts slavery as a social reality and seeks to instruct those in that system to behave in a godly manner.”<sup>5</sup> Such godliness in a less-than-ideal situation would underline the gospel and highlight Christ’s lordship (cf. Titus 2:9-10). So, while we are certainly not arguing for slavery and while we are thankful for those who led in the abolition of the slave trade in America, we pause this morning to consider that even within that oppressive institution, believing slaves and masters can be and must be Jesus-wrapped.

Most Bible students recognize that the most obvious parallel of the master/slave relationship in post-slavery American Christianity is in the workplace with the employer/employee relationship. Therefore, it simply will not do for an employee to excuse his ungodly behavior with, “But you don’t understand my boss,” or “but this isn’t the occupation that I wanted to be doing,” etc.—nor is it appropriate for an employer to argue away his harshness with the thought, “They deserve it because they’re so lazy,” etc.—for even in bond-slavery, Christ expects certain behavior from those whom He redeemed and whom His Father is recreating into the image of the Son (cf. I Peter 2:18).

See, we need to wrap up even our employment in Jesus Christ. Our study next week will consider Jesus-wrapped community involvement, and for most of us, that involvement starts in the workplace. So, lest the “doctrine of God our Savior” be maligned by those who see us most and know us best (cf. Titus 2:9-10), we must be careful to allow “Christ who is our life” (Colossians 3:4) to penetrate our workplaces, whether we are employers or employees.

This is further highlighted by again reviewing the context. Even in this practical section of Colossians 3:1-4:6, Paul refers to Jesus Christ 18 times. Eight times, the title “Lord” (lit. “Master”<sup>6</sup>) is used.<sup>7</sup> This is not accidental. Paul is demonstrating how our profession of faith in Jesus’ supremacy and sufficiency (chapters 1-2) should possess our very hearts and lives, too (chapters 3-4).<sup>8</sup> In other words, He will become our Lord, not just with lip-service, but in the way we live our lives—since He actually is supreme, sufficient, and satisfying, we will allow His heart to be ours (3:1-4), His behavior to be ours (3:5-11), His presence to be the reality in our churches (3:12-17), His will to be the standard of our homes (3:18-21), and His Lordship to be preeminent in our workplaces (3:22-4:1). We will demonstrate for the world to see that Jesus is Lord!

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> This is the same word for the “fleshly masters” in 3:22 and 4:1.

<sup>7</sup> The title “Lord” is used in the following verses: in 3:13, calling believers to forgive one another because their “Lord” forgave them; in 3:17, exhorting Christians to do all things “in the name of the Lord Jesus”; in 3:18 and 3:20, where family members are reminded that some behavior doesn’t fit with the “Lord”-ship of Christ in that home; and five times in 3:22-4:1, commanding slaves and masters to interact with the awareness of the ever-present ultimate “Lord.”

<sup>8</sup> We cannot divorce our practice from our position “in Christ”—He’s the very reason that we are different people (chapters 1-2) and must live distinct lives (chapters 3-4).

The concentration of Jesus’ title “Lord” in the section on slaves/masters in 3:22-4:1 is also not accidental. The point Paul is stressing is that Jesus Christ is involved even in the institution of slavery, as the ultimate “Master”; or, we could say that He is involved even in the workplace, as the ultimate “Supervisor.” Thus, the key phrase in this passage is found in verse 24—“you are enslaved to the Lord Christ”<sup>9</sup> (cf. Titus 1:1). As we will discover, this is true of both slaves and masters, of both employees and employers—believing workers and bosses both “serve the Lord Jesus.” And when this becomes the mental framework in which we engage in our work, then our employment truly becomes Jesus-wrapped.

In Colossians 3:22-4:1, Paul addresses both roles—employees and employers—and provides for each one keys for Christ-wrapped employment.

#### KEYS FOR CHRIST-WRAPPED EMPLOYEES (3:22-25)<sup>10</sup>

Paul first addresses slaves, or the 21<sup>st</sup> century corollary, employees. Believing employees actually have a higher calling than unbelieving employees, since they are “elect, holy, and beloved” (cf. 3:12)—indeed, they are employees of Christ. But to help them make that invisible reality a visible practice on earth, Paul provides them with three key-words to keep in mind in the workplace.

##### 1. *Obedience (v. 22a)*

This is fundamentally what employees are called to by Christ. Indeed, this is the one grand command from their heavenly “Master.” This was the same word used in Paul’s command for children to obey their parents (3:20). We saw last week that obedience begins by receiving the gospel (Romans 1:5; 10:16; II Thessalonians 1:8) and continues as a way of life for those who have been saved (II Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 2:12; I Peter 1:2). It was the obedience of the Savior Himself that accomplished righteousness for us (Romans 5:19; Hebrews 5:8), that we might be offered

<sup>9</sup> Or, “Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you’re serving is Christ” (Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002. Colossians 3:24.). On the unique combination of “Lord” and “Christ” without “Jesus,” Melick writes, “Perhaps the combination served to remind the slaves of one of two truths, or both. The first was that they were to be conscious of their salvation, which came from the same one who was their Master. If he cared enough to save, he could care for all their needs. The second was that the combination stresses two aspects of the Lord’s work which apply especially to slaves. His work of salvation was a total redemption. They knew that they served a Redeemer who is sovereign. He could deliver them in time, and he would deliver them in eternity. If, therefore, he allowed them to remain in slavery, he had some other plan for their lives. His plan temporarily overrode his deliverance. Whichever of these seem appropriate, the slaves were reminded that the Christian slave really serves the Lord” (Melick, Richard R. Vol. 32, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Electronic Ed., Logos Library System in *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001. P. 318.).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the sister-passage of Ephesians 6:5-8.

the gospel in the first place. Therefore, those who have submitted to the Lordship of Christ will be careful to wear His same garment of humble obedience. More specifically to verse 22, believing employees will be intent on “complying with the command, direction, or request of [their employer] and submitting to [his/her] authority.”<sup>11</sup>

However, the theoretical is always easier than the actual. Paul commands employees to obey their “masters according to the flesh” or their “fleshly masters.” This phrase both contrasts these earthy masters from our heavenly Master (cf. use of “flesh” in 1:22, 24; 2:1, 5) and highlights their fleshly nature in contrast to our own spiritual and recreated nature (cf. use of “flesh” in 2:11, 13, 18, 23). Since they are both earthy and natural, their authority over us will at times be burdensome and even oppressive. Nonetheless, our heavenly Master commands our obedience to them.

Furthermore, we are to obey our employers “in all things.” This phrase serves to further emphasize the non-negotiable nature of Christ’s command to His employees.<sup>12</sup> In “both enjoyable and distasteful duties,”<sup>13</sup> the employee is to submit to the God-determined authority of his/her employer.

Thus, the first governing key-word that the heavenly Master gives to His employees is *obedience*. This is His calling for their employment—they must obey those who are over them.

## 2. *Sincerity (vv. 22b-23)*

With this second key, we begin to learn what the nature of our obedience ought to be. We discovered with the Lord’s command to children that Jesus wants both their external obedience and their internal respect (cf. Ephesians 6:1-2). Similarly, the obedience of an employee to his employer must be done with genuineness and sincerity.<sup>14</sup> Consider the following translation of verses 22-23:

*Not with eye-service,  
as [mere] people-pleasers,  
But with sincerity of heart,  
[as] fearing the Lord.  
Whatever you might be doing, work from the soul,  
as to the Lord  
and not to men.*

<sup>11</sup> The definition of “obey” in the *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

<sup>12</sup> With the notable exception of allowable disobedience to our earthly employers when they command disobedience to our heavenly Lord (cf. Acts 5:29).

<sup>13</sup> MacArthur, p. 172.

<sup>14</sup> “Sincerity” is “the quality of being free from pretense, deceit, or hypocrisy” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). It indicates that the external is in harmony with the internal, that the morality is in agreement with the motive.

Notice two demonstrations of sincere obedience.

### a. *Internally-arising*

First, sincere obedience arises internally. “Eye-service” is used only here and in its sister passage in Ephesians 6:6. It refers to reluctant and hypocritical “service that is performed only to make an impression in the owner’s presence.”<sup>15</sup> The word “people-pleaser” is also used only in those two passages and defines “one who tries to make an impression on others,” especially describing “slaves who practice obsequious obedience when their owner is watching.”<sup>16</sup> Paul writes, therefore, against an obedience that exists only in the presence of the boss and that operates only to earn his favor. Both the standard (i.e., “eye-service”) and motive (i.e., “people-pleaser”) of this obedience are deficient for an employee of Christ.

Jesus’ employees perform their service “with sincerity of heart.” This phrase brings the standard and extent of obedience into the inner man—that is, our obedience is not satisfactory to our heavenly Master, unless it finds a complementary attitude in our heart. The word “sincerity” could be translated “simplicity,...uprightness, frankness” and is used today “of personal integrity.”<sup>17</sup> It’s what we refer to when we say that someone is “the real deal,” that “what you see is what you get” with a person. “Sincerity of heart” describes an employee who is the same when the boss is around and when the boss is not around—he has the same work ethic, the same attitude, the same pace, the same product, etc. This internal/external complementary work ethic is what models Christ and pleases our Master.

“Sincerity of heart” produces “work from the soul.”<sup>18</sup> The word for “work” denotes diligently engaging “in activity that involves effort,”<sup>19</sup> and “from the soul” demonstrates the wholistic, internal nature of such work. Therefore, in public and in private, externally and internally, the believing employee whose Lord is Jesus will choose to submissively obey his/her employer.

<sup>15</sup> Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. P. 744.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> It is also important to note the parallel between “whatever you might be doing” in Colossians 3:23 and “doing the will of God” in Ephesians 6:6. So, for slaves/employees, their work is the will of God for them. Therefore, it becomes even more clear why this work must be engaged in with sincere obedience.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

### **b. Spiritually-directed**

Second, sincere obedience is directed spiritually—that is, it is directed heavenward, to Jesus Christ Himself. Two phrases underline this point in these verses—“[as] fearing the Lord” and “as to the Lord and not to men.” The first phrase highlights a proper motive, and the second phrase underlines a proper manner.

A godly employee will be compelled to obey his earthly supervisor, because he “fears” Jesus Christ (cf. Ephesians 6:5; I Peter 2:18)—that is, he holds “God and His will in high regard.”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the proper manner of this sincere obedience is to offer it as if it were being offered to Jesus Christ Himself. If Christ is as real to him as is his earthly master—that is, if Christ really is his life (cf. 3:4)—then the believing servant will recognize Christ’s unseen authority and power in the seen authority and power of his earthly master, and he will submit to that in humble obedience.

Thus, the second guiding key-word that Paul gives to slaves and employees is *sincerity*. This is the manner in which their obedience must be offered—from the inside out and in faith, they must obey their masters as they would obey Jesus Christ. Such sincere obedience will serve to protect “the name of God and His doctrine” (I Timothy 6:1).

### **3. Compensation (vv. 24-25)**

The final key-word that Paul offers to believing slaves/employees is compensation. The words “payment” or “reward” (v. 24) and “repaid” (v. 25) bear this out. In the realm of slavery and employment, we may witness grave inequity and mistreatment. We may understandably complain about our wages (or lack thereof) on earth, but by faith we must recognize that in the big picture, we will reap what we sow. That truth offers both a positive promise and a negative warning (cf. II Corinthians 5:10).

#### **a. A positive promise**

Positively, Paul encourages employees to preach to themselves the following mindset: we know “that from the Lord you will receive the payment, [which is] the inheritance.” Paul broadens this principle in Ephesians 6:8, writing, “[For] each person, whether slave or free, if he does something good, this will be rewarded by the Lord.” As one writer puts it, “What you do matters to God; nothing is wasted.”<sup>21</sup> With this principle, Paul once again demonstrates that Jesus-wrapped employment starts with a Jesus-wrapped heart (cf. 3:1-4)—that is, as

Christian slaves/employees, we must walk by faith in Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency and not by sight, for what we see often seems to question this principle.<sup>22</sup> Cf. I Peter 2:18-25 concerning this principle and Jesus’ example for us in this regard.

One commentator writes,

*Paul introduced the [motive of reward] by appealing to what they knew already. They knew the doctrine of rewards and punishments; now they were to count on it with their lives. As slaves, they could look forward to little on this earth. Perhaps some rewards were given for good work, but there was no inheritance. In speaking of rewards, Paul challenged them to consider the fact that their rewards were spiritual. Such rewards could not be taken away, and the real Master would pay them what really matters.*<sup>23</sup>

MacArthur comments,

*The earthly master or boss may not give the servant what he deserves, but the Lord will. He is the One who will assure the eternal compensation is what it should be (cf. Rev. 20:12-13). Christian slaves are also heirs of eternal reward. As an employee on the job, or a servant in the home, it is the Lord Christ whom believers serve. He will pay them back with grace and generosity.*<sup>24</sup>

**Illustration:** Many of the negro spirituals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrate the motivation of spiritual compensation for those Christians in bondage. These believers teach “the free that real freedom is internal, rather than external. They have also shown that real riches may be found in the midst of earthly poverty.”<sup>25</sup>

#### **b. A negative warning**

The inverse of the principle above is also true, and Paul writes it out in verse 25: “The one who does wrong will be repaid [for] what he did wrong.” In essence, this warning is of God’s judgment—God will discipline all wrongdoing. We recognize this in the physical realm (cf. Philemon 18), but sometimes fail to appreciate it in the spiritual realm (cf. Galatians 6:7). In the vernacular, Paul is saying, “The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being a

<sup>20</sup> MacArthur, p. 172.

<sup>21</sup> Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love & Respect*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004. P. 272.

<sup>22</sup> “Being a Christian meant that the concerns of heaven were to occupy the thoughts and energies of those on earth” (Melick, p. 318).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, p. 174.

<sup>25</sup> Melick, p. 318.

follower of Jesus doesn't cover up bad work."<sup>26</sup> MacArthur adds, "The Christian servant is not to presume on his Christianity to justify disobedience."<sup>27</sup> The reason for this is that "there is no partiality" with the heavenly Master (cf. Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9). His punishment is without inequity or preference.

Thus, the final directing key-word that Paul gives to Jesus-wrapped slaves/employees is *compensation*. They must acknowledge that their behavior will be finally compensated—heavenly rewards for sincere obedience and punishment for insubordination.



**Application:** What has impacted you so far from this understanding of Christ-wrapped employment, explained by obedience, sincerity, and compensation? What have you learned about the standard and/or motive of Jesus-wrapped behavior from employees? Since, according to this passage, employees are to be sincerely obedient in light of spiritual compensation, how might employees practically accomplish this? What have been some of your excuses for not sincerely obeying your employer? *Open discussion.*

**Transition:** In Colossians 4:1, Paul turns his attention from slaves to masters, or, we could say, from employees to employers. In this verse, Paul provides two keys for Christ-wrapped employers.

### KEYS FOR CHRIST-WRAPPED EMPLOYERS (4:1)<sup>28</sup>

In this verse, Paul in one sense puts the masters in the same boat as the slaves, reminding them that "you also have a Master in heaven." Therefore, believing employers should view themselves as employers under Christ. That mindset is fleshed out in two key-words provided by Paul.

#### 1. Justice

God unequivocally commands masters to "give [what is] right and fair to your slaves." "Right" could be translate "just" or "upright" and refers to that which is in accordance with a standard, which is God's will as revealed in Scripture. "Fair" carries the idea of "equality." This kind of justice is practiced in the context of graciousness.

Kent explains these two terms,

*The equality...suggested here is probably not a demand that these owners free their slaves and thus make them social equals. The parallel passage in Ephesians required the masters to "do the same things" to their slaves as the slaves had been told to do to them (6:9), and this suggests the interpretation here. The slaves had been instructed to demonstrate the highest Christian ethics in performing their duties from the heart. The masters were now commanded to do the same in relation to their slaves. They were to treat them with justice and fairness, just as they expected to be served by their slaves. This general instruction to Christian masters is illustrated by Paul's exhortation to the slave owner Philemon, when he urged him to take back Onesimus as a "beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord" (Philem. 16). The equality of spiritual brotherhood was in Paul's mind.<sup>29</sup> Cf. 3:11; I Timothy 6:2*

Thus, the first guiding key-word for Jesus-wrapped employers to acknowledge is *justice*. They must be people of uprightness and fairness, recognizing the spiritual equality our position "in Christ" brings and allowing that to affect the way they practice their authority.

#### 2. Subordination

A second key for Christian masters/employees to keep in mind is subordination. Paul wants believing employers to preach to themselves the reality of their own subjection to Jesus, for they "know that you also have a Master in heaven." The application of this self-sermon will be the practice of justice toward those under their authority. The mindset of subordination will reign in the power of supervision and will keep employers responsible in their authority.

A wise employer will learn from the way in which his Master treats him—from the example of the heavenly Master, earthly believing masters can learn what justice and graciousness are and how they should be expressed toward subordinates. Furthermore, the believing employer is wise to heed the warning of verse 25. Since every employer is himself under the Lord's authority, his failure to be a just and gracious master will be punished by his Lord. The authority he possesses has been entrusted to Him by God, and if he is not a righteous steward, then his Master will discipline.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson, Colossians 3:25.

<sup>27</sup> MacArthur, p. 174.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the sister-passage of Ephesians 6:9.

<sup>29</sup> Kent, p. 151.

Therefore, the second governing key-word for Christian employers to keep in mind is *subordination*. They must daily understand that they, too, are under Authority—Jesus’ lordship both models for them how they should use their authority and provides accountability against the abuse of authority.



**Application:** What has impacted you so far from this understanding of Christ-wrapped employment, explained by justice and subordination, even in oversight? What have you learned about the standard and/or motive of Jesus-wrapped behavior from employers? Do the principles in this passage apply to an employer’s interaction with his/her unbelieving employees? If so, to what extent? Since, according to this passage, employers are to remember justice and their own subordination to a heavenly Master, how might employers practically accomplish this? What have been some of your excuses for not being just and gracious with your employees? *Open discussion.*

## CONCLUSION



“Several applications are clear [in these verses]. First, the primary concern in the text is a Christian response to life’s situations. If circumstances cannot be changed, Christians must respond with a sense of responsibility to God who has chosen not to alter their circumstances. No circumstance more dramatically presents that than slavery.

Second, a theology of work emerges. Genuine service in honest vocation brings honor to God. God watches the stewardship of energy, time, and life. This passage teaches that work is honorable even if the profits do not accrue to the worker. Selfish gain should not affect Christians’ work. They work in response to the Lord, realizing that God will ultimately supply the proper wages.

Third, the passage clearly teaches the equality and dignity of all persons. Masters had a master, and slaves had a freedom when they realized that their labors were not confined to this life and the coffers of earthly masters. Ultimately, individuals are judged by personal responses to the Lord in each situation.

These principles are adequately taught here. In contemporary life, the most probable parallel is the workplace, where these principles may be applied.”<sup>30</sup>

To simply summarize, believing employees and employers should wrap-up their workplaces in Jesus Christ. This visible expression of Jesus’ Lordship will highlight to the unbelieving community around us that Jesus is supreme and sufficient.

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<sup>30</sup> Melick, p. 320.