

Put on Christ in Your Workplace – Colossians 3:22-4:1

Introduction, Outlines

- **Scripture reading:** Colossians 3:22-4:1; Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Peter 2:18-25.
- **Non-biblical worldviews on work:** Some think of work merely as a means to earn money, so they can make a living and pursue pleasures; Others, on the contrary, consider work as their entire life (workaholic).
- **Biblical worldview on work:** Work is God's design in the creation of man. God gave work to man as soon as He created them (Genesis 1:28). Believers will be working forever in heaven (“serve”, “reign” = rule, Revelation 22:5). Work is God’s will to mankind; it is also the Christian’s God-given responsibility and an important aspect of our life of worship. Without neglecting other worship responsibilities, Christians serve Christ, follow Christ, please Christ, live out Christ, and glorify Christ by working diligently and wholeheartedly!
- **Outlines:**
 - Topic: Put on Christ in Your Workplace
 - A. Christ displayed by servants —— Obeying your masters in all things (3:22)
 - B. Christ displayed by masters —— Treating your servants justly and fairly (4:1)
 - C. A common principle —— Serving Christ wholeheartedly (3:23, 24b)
 - D. A common incentive —— Receiving a just reward from Christ (3:24a, 25)

Christ displayed by servants —— Obeying your masters in all things(3:22)

- “Slaves”: Today we can apply it to employees (to their employers) and students (to their teachers), but the original command was for the slaves in the social context of Bible times.

Slavery in Ancient Rome: They were treated as properties of their master, just like a land or a cow which could be traded. The master can even legally kill their slaves. The slaves have no freedom, because they belong to their masters. The slaves' fate is totally dependent on their masters, many of whom are not very nice to them. *“The Roman slaves were in very poor conditions. They were regarded as 'talking tools'. Slaves labored under the whip with shackles on their feet and were put in a dingy cellar kind of room at night. Slaves had no personal rights, no marriage rights, no family rights, no property rights. Slaves could be beaten, sold, or executed at will.”* —— Baidu Encyclopedia

Under this background, Paul says, “Slaves, in all things obey” your masters! **1 Peter 2:18** says to be submissive even to “unreasonable” masters ——unreasonable masters would beat and abuse their slaves as often as they want.

Attention: The Bible does not command Christians to change this sinful societal system, but to live out Christ’s life in that society. For most Christians, spending a huge amount of time worrying about politics and criticizing social problems is probably not God’s will for you —— Have you been faithful to what God has entrusted to you?

- **“in all things obey”:** You do what your boss tells you to do (unless you are asked to violate clear commands of the Bible, Acts 5:29). This is your Christian life testimony in your workplace!

Application: There will be things you like to do and those you don’t like at work. No one gets only what they like. When you’re asked to do what you don’t like, that’s when your flesh shows up, and you want to excuse yourself from doing it or complain about it. Remind yourself of this verse. Is your boss asking you to sin against God? Or is it your fleshly desire that doesn’t want to do it? In addition, the text challenge us right in the following two ways:

- “not with external service, as those who *merely* please men”: We need to be the same whether or not our boss is present. We should not work merely for man, but know that there is a master in heaven who observes us all the time. If you work differently when your boss is around, you have to examine yourself and see who it is that you’re really trying to please—your boss on earth, or your master in heaven.
- “but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord”: Your attitude and action must agree. Obedience must be from the heart. This deals with the inner motive behind obeying in all things. “Sincerity of heart” means pure motive that’s consistent with external behavior. No hidden agenda. “Fearing the Lord” is the essential difference between hard-working believers and non-believers, for the ultimate pursuit of Christians is the glory of Christ our Lord.

A common principle —— Serving Christ wholeheartedly (3:23, 24b)

- “Whatever you do”: Not only for servants obeying their masters, but also for the masters. The principles are “do your work heartily (or wholeheartedly)” and “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”
- **“Heartily”:** “heart” (*psyche*) is often translated as “soul” or “life” elsewhere. Paul wants us to work with our soul and life! Doing things wholeheartedly is the work principle for Christians, and you can’t be half-hearted and perfunctory.
- “as for the Lord rather than for men”: So we cannot neglect other responsibilities the Lord entrusted to us, such as family and church: but since work is also for the Lord, we need to do it wholeheartedly when we work, as a service to our Lord.
- **“Lord Christ.....you serve”:** Ultimate master-slave relationship. There are more than five Greek synonyms which may mean “serve”, here uses the verb of “slave”, and slave can only

belong to one master, so this master-slave relationship is exclusive (cf. Matthew 6:24 ““No one can serve two masters”). Paul didn’t say “serve your masters on earth”, but ‘obey,’” because the Christians serve one and only one Master, that is, the Lord Christ.

Ponder what an honorable task this is! The One we serve is the Lord who created and rules the heavens, the earth, and everything in them! He is the Lord who loves us and shed His blood to redeem us from our sins! He is the Lord who delivered us from God’s wrath and reconciled us to our heavenly Father! He is the Lord who will be with us forever in the kingdom of Light! He is the Lord who will reward us for all our service in the Holy Spirit to Him in this life with absolute justice and fairness! There is no master on earth who can compare to this Master! Who else would you rather serve?

A common incentive —— Receiving a just reward from Christ (3:24a, 25)

The Lord’s reward includes positive and negative aspects:

- “receive the reward of the inheritance” Positive incentive. The Lord’s reward should be the motivation for working hard.

Analogy: If God says, you only need to work really hard for one hour, and if you work with all your strength for just this one hour, you’ll be rewarded with joy, peace and unimaginable blessings for the rest of your whole life, would you work hard for this one hour? The work of this life is that one hour in comparison to eternity!

Is this seeking selfish gain? No. All our reward is used to glorify Christ. All Christians’ righteous deeds which are pleasing to God are manifestations of Christ’s life. More reward will show more glory of Christ!

“inheritance”: Inherited possession, including land, house and others, which are things that the slaves won’t be able to possess in their whole life on earth. The worldly possession is temporary, tainted by sin, and eventually to perish; but Christians possess “the promise of the eternal inheritance” (**Hebrew 9:15**), which is “imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (**1 Peter 1:4**).

Revelation 21:2-7 has a clearer description regarding this possession. The Holy city new Jerusalem and all its glory is the possession of victorious believers who “will inherit these things” (revelation 21:7) —— Let that become the motivation of your service!

“he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done”: Negative incentive. It is not the judgment for sin, since the believers’ sin has been paid in full on the cross (2:13-14; Romans 8:1). The consequence here is the loss of your heavenly prize in 2:18, or the fire that tests the believers’ works in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

“without partiality”: The ancient Roman slaves did not get fair treatment from their masters, but Paul did not even mention the social problem, but only called them to focus on the eternal hope, for our Lord will reward all Christians’ deeds with absolute justice and without partiality. If you have an unreasonable boss, what do you do? Complaining around? Or keeping your eyes on the eternal hope, doing your job, and trusting the just Master?

Christ displayed by masters —— Treating your servants justly and fairly (4:1)

- “grant to your slaves justice and fairness”: This is totally revolutionary in that social background! It was a generally accepted social norm that slave owners oppress and exploit at will. The reason is “knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”

Summary

1. We cannot accomplish such a high standard for work depending on our own strength! So the gospel truth in the previous text is of uttermost importance. We do not proclaim moral principles for work. Moral principles cannot save, only Christ can! Moral principles cannot give you a new life, only Christ can! Moral principles may change your outward appearance, but cannot change your sinful heart, only Christ can! Moral principles separated from Christ cannot sanctify you to please God, only Christ can!

2. As Christians grow by the power of the Holy Spirit in these areas, we will see the life of Christ. When masters treated their slaves with justice and fairness, we see the image of Christ who is just and fair. When slaves obey their masters in all things even when it costs them dearly, we see Christ’s submission and sacrifice (1 Peter 2:22). Do you want to see Christ’s glory? Is Christ’s glory truly what you desire? Then go and put on Christ in your workplace as is taught here.