

Christ-Centered Work

Colossians 3:22-4:1 - NCBC, Nov 1, 2015

Main Point: **Christ-centered work aims to serve our Heavenly Master above all else.**

- **Christ-centered employees obey their employers in the fear of the Lord (3:22-23)**
 - With Sincerity (3:22)
 - Motivated by Reward (3:24a)
 - Motivated by Awe (3:24b)
 - Motivated by Justice (3:25)
- **Christ-centered employers deliberately provide for their employees (v. 4:1)**
 - With Justice and Fairness (4:1a)
 - Motivated by Accountability (4:1b)

Application: **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.**

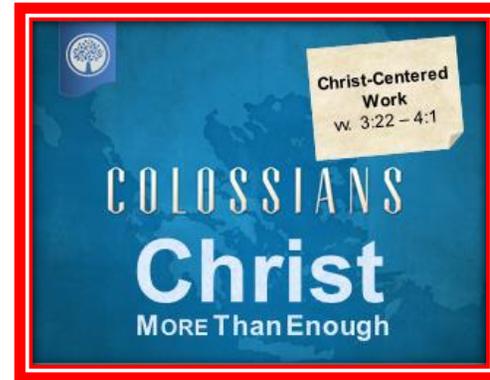
- Be filled with God's Spirit and God's Word (Eph 5:18-6:9, Col 3:12-4:1)
- Set your mind on things above, not on things of this earth (Col 3:1-2)

Opening Announcements:

Glenda Reese's step-father, Glenn Sparks, passed away on Tues 10/27/15.

Fall Festival thank-you. upcoming SHAPE class

<< All to Us >>



Let's now continue our worship by reading from God's Word. Please open your Bible to **Colossians chapter 3**.

If you do not have a Bible with you today, we'd love to give you one. Please catch the attention of the ushers as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible to use this morning. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Every year as we take time to remember our brothers and sisters who are imprisoned and persecuted for their faith, it seems to come closer and closer to our own personal lives, doesn't it? I was struck recently that there are 2 sure-fire ways for us believers to avoid persecution.¹ If we want to insulate and insure ourselves from the risk of persecution as Christ's followers, there's 2 ways to make that happen. First,

¹ Thankful to Pastor Tim Challies for his provoking thoughts here.

1. Christians can live *outside* the world – to seclude ourselves away from it. We will never come in contact with the people who would persecute us. But it has a high cost – It also keeps our faith and our Savior far from the people that God has sent us to serve.
2. Or, secondly, we could live *in* the world, but remain *like* the world – if we live just like the unbelievers around us, there will be nothing that stands out – nothing worth persecuting.

The first option allows us to escape persecution by withdrawing. The second by assimilating and accommodating.

But God calls His church to be salt and light in this world – to be a public people who are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. To plant ourselves in the midst of our watching communities, and live very different lives. Some will hear, see, and be persuaded... but many more will see, be convicted, and persecute us.

So as we consider our persecuted brothers and sisters today ... let's remember that we must expect persecution for ourselves, and for our loved ones... persecution is promised to the faithful.² So let's not lose heart church...this world is not our home. And our lives are not our own. We have been made Christ's ambassadors... may our lives and lips be exhilarated by God's love and grace – and may God use us for His glory in our region.

² 2 Tim 3:12

So as we turn our attention to God's word in Colossians 3 this morning, let's joyfully remember that Jesus is more than enough for us church! Yes our relationship with Christ will often cost us esteem and promotion in a competitive marketplace driven by greed and selfish ambition...but may our only boast be Christ! All I have is Christ – Jesus is my life!!

Our text this morning from Colossians 3 is found on page **984** of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read our text from **Colossians 3:22**, reading from the **English Standard Version**:

Colossians 3:22-4:1 *Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, 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. **4** Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

This is the word of our Lord. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

Our Savior is so wonderful church. When you come to know Jesus Christ by faith – and the Holy Spirit opens

your eyes and inclines your heart to obey and believe His good news – your entire life is transformed. **Knowing the sufficiency of Christ invites us to live ordinary lives in extraordinary ways.**

And this is good news for us who live in a time and place where our modern view of work and the workplace is particularly cynical and disillusioned. Certainly perspectives on work have evolved over time.³

For example, in the classical periods, hard work was viewed as a **curse**, and life of thinking and ease was envied.

By the medieval times, the highest calling was the life of the **contemplative monk**.

However during the reformation, work was viewed as a **“calling” or “vocation”** where one’s labors was a supreme act of devotion to God – no matter how small or insignificant.

And then along came the Industrial revolution in America, which prioritized **wage-earning** as the highest motivation for work.

And now more recently, the Information Revolution has driven an attitude of **fatalism** in the workplace as more and more professionals become disillusioned by the greedy, materialistic, and law-suit-happiness of the contemporary marketplace.

³ Block, “For the Glory of God! A Biblical Theology of Worship”, 69-70.

Church – if we are going to live for Christ in extraordinary and Christ-centered ways in today’s marketplace – we desperately need to hear God’s Word.

God’s ways are radically different from man’s ways – and that is clearly seen when we come to the marketplace of production, service, and ideas.

When I graduated from college I had the privilege of interviewing with several quality businesses. But when I talked with the small family-owned company that I eventually worked for, it was a very different conversation.

The owner humbly shared that contrary to what was on the legal papers, he didn’t own the business. God did. And that meant that he and his employees tried to manage the business as much as possible according to the principles found in God’s Word. Because it was God’s business – and every part of it was God’s first.

Sacrificial generosity. Servant-hearted interactions. Faithfulness in word and deed. Public use of prayer and Christ-honoring music. Spirit-empowered diligence and creativity. Quick and sincere submission to all authority. An honest pursuit of excellence in every aspect. These were some of the biblical priorities that defined this business from the very top-down.

But that wasn’t all. Not only did this business tithe financially from its net income throughout the year, but the owner explained how they wanted to tithe my own position there. Even though I was hired as a full-time

salaried employee – 10% of my time would be donated to the ministry of my choice. And so that’s exactly what happened.

Even though I was still on the business payroll – every Friday afternoon I was actively serving as a volunteer in a local biblical counseling ministry – blessing others through the generosity of an employer who understood that it was the Lord who gave, and the Lord who took away – blessed be the name of the Lord!⁴

Now of course, I don’t share this to bring glory to any man, nor to imply that these specific *applications* must be practiced by all Christian employers. However it’s refreshing to see biblical *principles* sacrificially put into practice – and excel – in a real world of dog-eat-dog competition and narcissism.

In hearing this you might ask – how did that family come to practically run their business in this way? What motivated them time and time again to keep making the extraordinary sacrifices that were demanded by such practices?

I believe the answer lies in the main point of our message this morning from **Colossians 3**. This we understand that **Christ-centered work aims to serve our Heavenly Master above all else.**

⁴ Job 1:21



Our work is not primarily about me. Not just about making a living. Not just about keeping the boss off my back. Not just a necessary path to the possibility of retirement someday. No. Christ-centered work is about serving our Lord and Master Jesus Christ above all else – right here and now.

My former employer understood and practiced this truth in exemplary ways.

All employment is a means of worship. God gives all of us many different gifts and talents so that our souls might find enjoyment in our labor, Ecclesiastes 2:24 says. Since our life has been hidden together with Christ by faith, then **our work should adorn the doctrine of God and increase the attractiveness of the Gospel (Titus 2:9-10).**

No matter if you are currently a servant or a master – or if you are actively seeking to be an employee or employer – God’s word transforms your ordinary into extraordinary as you allow it to dwell richly within you in this part of

your life. So let's begin in verse 22, as we first learn that **Christ-centered employees obey their employers in the fear of the Lord (3:22-25)**



We must keep in mind that Paul is writing this letter to Colossian believers who were entrenched in the practice of slavery. Historians tell us there were over 60 million household slaves in the Roman empire at this time, and they were often treated with no more respect than one would give to a useful tool.

But now both masters and slaves were coming together in Christ – as Paul wrote above in verse 11 – Christ is all, and is in all – and in Christ there is no more distinction between slaves and free.

In fact, in chapter 4 verse 9, we learn that a slave named Onesimus is accompanying the delivery of the Colossians and Philemon letters to Colossae.

So keep in mind as we go through this passage – Paul was not historically writing to employees and employers –

rather to slaves and masters. He was writing to those who were **involuntarily** bound to **inescapable** **relationships**. That is quite different than most employee and employer relationships. And so, if these principles were significant enough to transform the Roman slave system, even more these Christ-centered principles are sufficient to bring extraordinary life and purpose to our voluntary employee and employer relationships.

So in our context today, how does this obedient and submissive attitude show up? **With Sincerity (3:22)**



Notice verse 22,

Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Remember high school gym class? The teacher would announce – let's do some push-ups...and the class would groan and get into the position on the gym floor. And then he would walk from one end of the gym to

another yelling out, “down, down” and the class was expected to count their push-ups with every repetition. But it wouldn’t take long and some would watch the teacher – and keep counting all the while they were just resting on the ground until he would turn and they would energetically continue their exercises – only as long as coach’s eyes were on them.

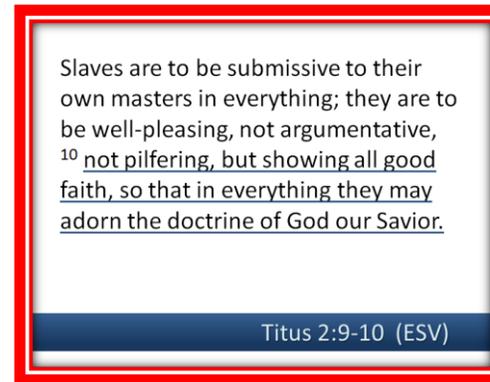
This is an example of serving by way of eye-service – as people pleasers. Only working when seen. Only being diligent and faithful when you think someone is watching.

But when is God not watching?

Fearing the Lord means living with a conscious awareness of God’s power, presence, and promises in my life. God is all-powerful and all-righteous, and He is right here beside me right now. Such awareness is the beginning of all wisdom. Such fear inspires wholehearted service to our earthly masters.

So for us who are gainfully employed – let’s not cut corners in our work just to try to please our boss. The goal at work is not to impress other people... the goal is to worship and please God – through faith as we wholehearted labor for the sake of His Name.

Consider Titus 2:9-10 in view of this:

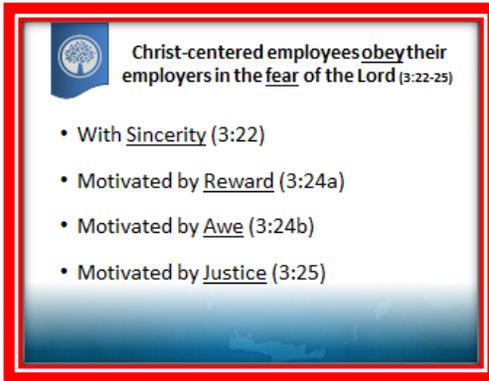


Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

So negative employees or those who just do enough to get by are pilfering or *stealing* their employers’ time and resources.

But employees who are obedient to their employers’ charges are demonstrating ultimate faith in God Himself – and thereby making the doctrine of God Himself beautiful and attractive.

As if this Gospel-adorning motivation is not enough for all of us to be “Jesus-with-skin-on” in our workplaces, Colossians 3 goes on to provide 3 motivations for slaves to obey their earthly masters wholeheartedly– not just in outward appearance.



First, in verse 24 Paul says that we are all called to work for the Lord, and not for men - no matter what we do – since we know that the Lord Jesus will be the One who gives us our final **Reward (3:24a)**

So many people today work for financial rewards that come to one who can close the deal, meet objectives, and outperform others. But employees of Jesus Christ – consider your future reward! Stock options that are out of this world! Raises that are literal. And what does the text say, **“the inheritance”** as your reward. Your reward is the inheritance – God is your father, and you are His heir! Like most inheritances – you don’t earn it. It’s a gracious gift. And here the reward is **eternal life in the presence of God Himself**. Loved ones – work for the Lord in everything you do on this earth – for the Lord Himself will be your reward.

So whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men, since you know that God Himself will be your reward.

Secondly, be **motivated by Awe (3:24b)**

Did you notice the phrase at the end of verse 24?

For you are serving – literally the word is “continually slaving for” the Lord Christ.

Here two titles for Jesus are combined together – **Lord** – the title meaning Sovereign, King, the One who is our Master... and **Christ** – meaning Anointed One, Messiah, the One who sacrificed Himself for us.

The slaves ultimately served a Master who was their Redeemer as well. Their redeemer was their sovereign Lord. Just as they trusted in Jesus for their salvation – so they could trust in Jesus as their heavenly Master – for He would deliver them from their sufferings at the right time.

Church – consider the wonder of this statement this morning. Every morning when you begin your commute, you are serving the Lord Christ. Every time you get your worklist or pick up the phone, or go into another meeting... **“Sovereign Grace”** is the Name of your Master. O be awed by this truth this morning! Could you possibly have any better boss than Lord Christ? Could any other master motivate you to greater expressions of honest diligence and wholehearted excellence?

Finally, Christ-centered employees are motivated to obey their employers in the fear of the Lord by His Impartial **Justice (3:25)**.

Verse 25 says,

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

God doesn't play favorites. It doesn't matter if you are the bottom of the totem pole, or the king of the hill... it doesn't matter if you are the powerful rich, or the invisible poor ... God's final justice on the day of judgment is impartial. Unlike earthly masters, the judgment of our Lord is not based on outward appearances...but on the true reality of the inward heart.

So if you are tempted to defraud your employer with just a half-hearted work ethic, or if you are using the sins of your employer as justification for your own wrong-doings... heed the warning today. God will judge all wrong-doers. God is watching. Live out your employment in the fear of the Lord.

God is a God of impartial justice – and so justice will be completed someday for every one of our sins – either through the sufferings of our Lord Christ on the cross, or through our own eternal separation from God forever and ever in hell.

Are you living for the right master with a capital “M” today? Have you received Christ's covering for your sins? God is an impartial judge – please don't die before you know Jesus as your Lord Christ.

Now I don't know if Onesimus got to read the letter to the Colossians before they left Rome... but if he did I'm

guessing he was really thankful the Holy Spirit breathed out verse 1 of chapter 4 in Colossians.

For this verse says,

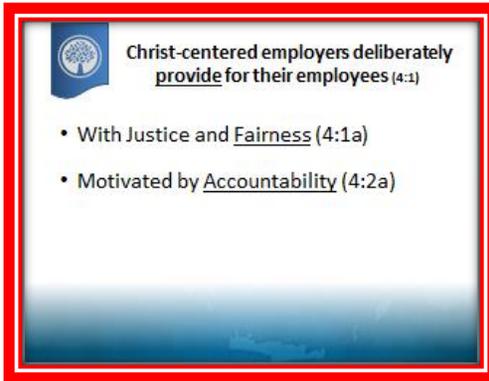
Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Here Paul addresses the heart of slavery without shifting his focus from the gospel to social reform. And the principle is easily transferrable to contemporary employment:

Christ-centered employers deliberately provide for their employees (v. 4:1)



As Jesus said in Luke 10:7, “the laborer deserves his wages.” Employers have a responsibility to provide – or deliberately care for – their employees with **With Justice and Fairness (4:1a)**



How do employers maintain a Christ-centered perspective in the midst of crazy marketplace demands and strenuous employee relations?

By intentionally seeking to provide for every employee with justice and fairness. In other words – treating every one of their employees just how they would want their Heavenly Master to treat them. Caring for their welfare. Not abusing their authority, but recognizing the essential equality and dignity of all persons. Not treating them harshly or taking advantage of employees in any way, but rather providing honest and fair compensation for their work.

In short – **Christ-centered employers treat their employees in such a way that it should make people want to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.** This is so counter-cultural in a marketplace today that greedily values efficiency more than effectiveness. Employers often justify their poor treatment of their staff as “well – I had to pay my dues, and now it’s their turn.” Or “they should just be thankful they still have a job.”

But a Christ-centered employer is deliberate in providing for every one of their employees, because they are **Motivated by Divine Accountability (4:1b).**

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

There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.⁵ And so Christian employers must continually keep this truth in mind...

Both the employer and the employees ultimately have the same boss. And it’s not the board of directors or the shareholders. It’s Lord Christ.

He is the One who will ultimately determine whether or not your employees have been treated fairly and justly by you. There is no partiality in our Lord Christ.

Can you imagine how this teaching revolutionized the Roman empire’s practice of slavery as Christians began to obey God’s commands from the heart and embrace the truth that Christ was all and in all – and that masters and slaves are made equal – not in their economic condition – but in their brotherly relationship through Christ.

So if someone could witness how you seek to serve your employer, or how you treat your employees... what or who would they believe you were worshipping?

⁵ Romans 13:1

This morning our Scripture has summoned every one of us – no matter our age, or whether we are in school or retired... that **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.**



We must remember our context for these truths today. It is impossible to practice Christ-centered work apart from first experiencing God's saving work in our own heart and mind.

Where we may discern a response of conviction in our hearts this morning, let us take care not to just respond by "fruit-nailing"... just trying to change our behavior without addressing the inward idolatries of our own heart.

Laziness is just as sinful as working too much. Greed is just as sinful as finding your identity in your accomplishments. Taking advantage of your employees is just as sinful as just going to work for the paycheck alone.



So this morning we are reminded of the necessity for each of us who are ambassadors for Jesus Christ to **Be filled with God's Spirit and God's Word (Eph 5:18-6:9, Col 3:12-4:1)**

You won't learn these essential principles of Christ-centered work from going to a secular business school. The secular marketplace has little value on servant-hearted leadership, generosity, and love. And yet that's exactly the claim of God's Gospel upon our lives as His slaves. So we must be under the control of God's Spirit, rather than the spirit of this age. We must have our minds continually refreshed with the truths of God's indwelling Word if we are to rightly serve the Lord Christ.

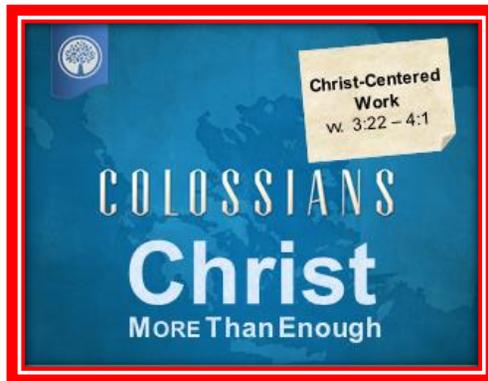
Just as this chapter started, so it ends. We must have our **minds set on things above, not on things of this earth (Col 3:1-2)**

Wives are to "look above" to Christ as their example of submission. Husbands are to "look above" to Christ as their example of love. Children are to "look above" to

Christ as their example of obedience. Slaves are to “look above” to Christ as their impartial rewarder. And Masters are to “look above” to Christ as their heavenly judge.

So may we be constant in prayer church. For prayer aligns our hearts to God and to His will. Look up – and remember – our workplace is a platform for sharing the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as our Lord. Christ-centered employees are constantly seeking to make everyone around them better for the glory of God – and thus adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Christ-centered employers are constantly seeking to care for every one of their charges – so that every one of their employees would want to serve our wise, kind, and generous Heavenly Master.

In brief – **every expression of Christ-centered work aims to serve our Heavenly Master above all else.**



Next week we are looking at Christ-centered Evangelism. How exactly does God intend for His church to interact with a world full of hatred and unbelief. It will be a good

study... spend time prayerfully preparing your heart this week for how God may decide to challenge you with His word...and come ready to respond by faith!

Let's pray. **Closing prayer.**

Closing Song – <<All I Have is Christ>>

Jude 24-25 *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*