

Working for Christ (Colossians 3:22-4:1)

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

That is the prime directive for Christian living. We need to be about glorifying our Lord and Savior in everything we do. We Christians provide the lens through which yet-to-believers can see the grace of God. They need to observe the hope we have within us. They need to see our peace, which passes all understanding. They need to look at us and see a supernatural joy, no matter what our circumstances.

Last week, Paul showed us how we need to glorify Christ in our families. He set a really high standard and as we look at that standard we might be tempted to get discouraged.

“I don’t think I can do that,” you might say.

Well you’re right ... you can’t. Not on your own. But if you have Jesus, you have His Spirit dwelling within you. If you yield to the Holy Spirit, your life will be transformed and you can say along with Paul.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

As we continue with Colossians this week, we’ll be turning from your family life to your work life. Just as you are to glorify Christ in your family, you are to work in such a manner that it exalts Jesus. Sometimes that’s difficult. Sometimes your work environment is hostile to the Christian faith but you must not use it as an excuse. When the world gets darker, Christ needs to shine brighter.

Labor, like family, was ordained by God. He designed us to work. Even before the fall, God gave humanity something to do:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. (Genesis 2:15)

At that point, labor was never tedious. But after the fall, we read:

"Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:17-19)

So now, work can be a real drag. Things we accomplish tend to come undone. Often, our work requires great effort. Still, work is something we need. Solomon said:

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

And in that verse we see the roots of what has been called the Christian work ethic. We need to be occupied. We need to be useful. It’s how God designed us and we cannot find true contentment if we remain idle.

So let’s see what Paul has to say about this in Colossians 3, beginning with verse 22.

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. (Colossians 3:22)

The word translated “bondservant” is *doulos* in the Greek. It means “slave”. We certainly don’t like to consider ourselves to be slaves, do we. In fact, our modern ethic shrinks from it. But you have to understand that in the First Century culture, there were more slaves than there were free folks. It doesn’t make it right. It doesn’t mean God condones slavery but it is just the way it was. In the city of Rome, somewhere between 25% and 40% of the population were slaves and the percentage was much higher in agricultural regions. It wasn’t just manual laborers. Many teachers, physicians, and other professionals were actually slaves.

Some folks were born into slavery. Others became slaves as a result of military conquest. It was a way out if you had debts you couldn’t pay and you could voluntarily become a slave. You could join yourself to a masters. In doing so, you agreed to do whatever he told you to do and the master was responsible for meeting your physical needs. Food, clothing, etcetera, were the responsibility of the master.

Naturally, there was a great deal of abuse. Many slaves were treated very poorly. Largely because of that, many slaves did their level best to do the least amount of work they could get away with. But Paul says that Christian slaves have an obligation to obey their masters in everything they do. But it was not because they wanted to please men.

How many of you have known somebody who works really hard when the boss is around, but when the boss disappears, they slack off? It’s human nature. Our fallen flesh has a tendency to be lazy but that’s not how the Christian is to work. You are not to just give eye service to the job at hand. You are to work with sincerity of heart, fearing God.

This idea of fearing God, is one that is a little challenging for a lot of folks. For the Christian, it is not a craven fear where you hide your face and call for the mountains to fall on you. But we still need to fear God. We need to stand in awe of all that He is. He’s not some cute grandpa like George Burns in that old move “Oh God”.

The Bible is pretty thorough in exhorting us to maintain a healthy fear of the Almighty.

And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding.' " (Job 28:28)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever. (Psalms 111:10)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, (Proverbs 15:33)

The fear of the LORD leads to life, (Proverbs 19:23)

We are to submit to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21)

And in Revelation we read:

*Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, "**Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.**" (Revelation 14:6-7)*

Solomon, at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes writes this:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

It is our purpose for living – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This idea of “fearing God” is completely tied up in the chief aim of humanity and Solomon tells us why:

For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14)

You see, being a Christian is not just about getting your ticket punched for heaven. It is about living a life that glorifies your Savior. And everything you do will be judged ... Not for your salvation, if you are a Christian ... But for your reward. I don't know about you, but I want to hear the words “Well done, good and faithful servant;”

You fear God because you understand that there is a judgment coming. You fear God because you understand that nothing you do can measure up to His standard of holiness. And so as you fear God, you run to the cross. You trust Jesus alone for your salvation. You make Him your Lord and then everything you do in this life, you do for Him.

Of course, you're not a slave, a *doulos*, are you? You might work for wages, but you're not a slave. Wait a second here, scooter. According to the Bible, you are a slave. Everyone is a slave. According to the Bible, you're either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. I want to be a slave to righteousness, because Jesus tells me, and He tells you:

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:29-30)

His yoke is a yoke of slavery to Christ, but ironically, it is the only way you can be free from the sin that so easily ensnares you. If the Son has set you free, you shall be free indeed! So we need to submit to Him.

And we need to submit to our employers. Christians need to be obedient employees. Christians need to be the best employees anywhere, always giving an honest day's work, always serving their employers as if they were serving Christ Himself.

Because you are.

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24)

This is such an important concept that Paul states it twice. Work heartily. Work as if you are serving the Lord. And understand that it is the Lord who is going to reward you.

Well, hopefully, if you work in this world, you will receive your wages, but don't work for those wages! Don't work for the stuff and junk of this world. Don't work for that nice vacation or that new car. Don't work for a comfortable retirement. Work for Jesus!

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)

Now, I know we have a fair number of retirees in our church and it's wonderful that you can enjoy retirement. But retirement should not mean that you stop working altogether. In fact, retirement can free you up to serve the Lord in a very real way.

I've known so many schoolteachers who work like dogs to get to retirement and when they get to retire, their health seems to plummet. It's not true in every case, but those who struggle the most with their retirement are those who don't have anything to do with

their time. So my advice is, find some labor. Make it a labor of love. Maybe it's taking care of grandkids. Maybe it's working in the garden. Maybe it's working on your golf game. (I could get behind that.) But whatever you do, find a way to do it for the Lord. because ...

... he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. (Colossians 3:25)

As a Christian, you will be called to give an account for the stewardship of the gifts you have been given. Yield to Christ. Work for Christ.

We're at the end of Chapter 3 in Colossians, but we're not going to stop because the first verse in Chapter 4 relates to this as well. The chapter and verse headings were not part of the original writings in scripture, so they are not inspired and sometimes they end up being in some pretty strange places!

Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Colossians 4:1)

If you happen to be the boss, you don't get a pass. In fact, if you're the supervisor, you need to be even more diligent in working for the Lord. The economy of the kingdom is not like the economy of the world. Jesus said:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

Supervisors, you have a great responsibility to glorify the Lord Jesus by how you treat your employees. You need to serve them as Christ serves you. You need to be just and fair. You need to put your folks in a position where they can succeed. You need to allow them to take ownership. You need to be a facilitator ... a teacher.

Most of you know I was a school administrator in a previous life. The guy I reported to was really fond of saying: "The root of administrator is minister." He lived it and he demanded that we live it to with the folks we supervised. I loved working for Him. He was a Christian and He glorified His Lord and Savior in his work life because while most thought he was working for the Marysville School District, in reality, he was working for Christ.