



## **Working for the Lord**

### **Colossians 3:22-4:1**

#### **1. Slaves, Obey Your Masters (verses 22-25).**

#### **2. Masters, Deal Justly and Fairly with Your Slaves (verse 1).**

America has been greatly blessed because of a phenomenon known as “The Protestant Work Ethic.” Before the days of the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had separated work into two categories: the sacred and the secular. The results of this separation was to diminish the value of the secular work into a “secondary grade of piety,” which led to the disheartening of typical laborers. This led to a natural laziness among the people and all of the resultant hardships that would follow as a result. But, through the Protestant reformation in the 1500’s, this dichotomy was eliminated. “It was Martin Luther, more than anyone else, who overthrew the notion that clergymen, monks, and nuns were engages in holier work than the housewife and shopkeeper.” [\[1\]](#) John Calvin said this: “It is an error that those who flee worldly affairs and engage in contemplation are leading an angelic life. ... We know that men were created to busy themselves with labor and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when each one attends to his calling and studies to live well for the common good.” [\[2\]](#) ... And the rest of the Protestant world followed suit. The result was that all of the work that we do upon the earth was given dignity. Every sort of work was considered noble (providing, of course, that it wasn’t sinful). And much blessing has come upon those nations who have embraced this ethic of work.

We are creatures who have been made to work. It is not good for a man to be idle. It is good for a man to work. Even Benjamin Franklin, the deist, noticed this. His sayings are well known: "A penny saved is a penny earned." "A stitch in time saves nine." "Early to be and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." At one point in his life, he was commissioned to build a fort as part of military operations. He spoke of the difference between the days when they were able to work vs. the days when it rained.

In his autobiography, he made the following observation, ...

When men are employed they are best contented; for on the days they worked they were good natured and cheerful, and, with the consciousness of having done a good day's work, they spent the evening jollily; but on our idle days they were mutinous and quarrelsome, finding fault with their pork, the bread, etc., and in continual ill humor, which put me in mind of a sea-captain whose rule it was to keep his men constantly at work; and when his mate once told him that they had done everything, and there was nothing further to employ them about, "Oh," says he, "make them scour the anchor." [\[3\]](#)

This morning we come to a text that speaks about our work. I have entitled my message this morning, "Working for the Lord." As believers in Christ, we are called to labor and labor hard in our work as unto the Lord. Let's begin by considering the greater context in which we find our actual text.

Colossians 3:18-4:1

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

We have here three sets of commands. The first set comes in verses 18-19. It deals with the marriage relationship. Wives are called to submit to their husbands (verse 18). Husbands are called to love their wives (verse 19). The next set comes in verses 20-21. This set deals with the relationships in the home: with parents and children. Children are called to obey their parents (verse 20). Fathers are told not to exasperate their children (verse 21). The final set of instructions come in verses 22 through chapter 4, & verse 1. These verses deal with the master/slave relationship. When you boil it all down, the message is close to the message given to the other groups of people: Slaves are called to obey their masters (verse 22). Masters are called to treat their slaves justly and fairly (chapter 4, verse 1).

Now, when you overview all of these verses together, one thing really stands out: The number of words that Paul devotes to instructing the slaves. In giving these instructions he includes one verse for wives, one verse for husbands, one verse for children, one verse for fathers, one verse for masters, and four verses for slaves. I took out my Greek text this week and counted the number of words that Paul used in addressing these differing groups of people. When instructing the wives, I counted that Paul used 9 words. When instructing the husbands, Paul used 10 words. When instructing the children, Paul used 13 words. When instructing the fathers, Paul used 10 words. When instructing the masters, Paul used 18 words. But, when he instructed the slaves, Paul used 56 words! This is almost as many as he used in addressing all of the other five groups combined (it's merely four words shy!).

This type of thing ought to get your attention. Whenever you study the Bible, it's a good practice to see how much space is used to address particular topics. When the Bible is silent on a particular topic, surely there is a reason for it. When the Bible has a strong emphasis in another area, surely there is another reason for it. There is a reason why the Bible gives us four perspectives on the life of Christ. There is a reason why Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel are so long (60/280), comprising more than 20% of the Old Testament, even though their message may easily be summed up in one word: repent! There is a reason why Paul's letters dominate the New Testament teaching about Christ. In a similar fashion, there is a reason why Paul would devote so much of his attention toward the role of slaves in this epistle to the Colossians. I believe that it has to do with the situation in Colossae, as well as in the ancient world.

It has been estimated that slaves comprised about a third of the population in Rome during the days of Paul. [\[4\]](#) Some have placed this estimate at half (or even more) of the entire population were slaves. [\[5\]](#) There were many ways in which you could become a slave in his day. Prisoners of war were often taken as slaves. Criminals were often punished by being sold into slavery. If you had amassed a large debt, you could pay the debt by giving yourself voluntarily as a slave. If you were the son (or daughter) of slaves, you would naturally become a slave as well. [\[6\]](#) Somehow, in some way, a third of the population were slaves. It's probably the case that this was true of Colossae as well.

I wouldn't be surprised at all if a major percentage of the church were slaves. James said that it's the poor of this world that are rich in faith (James 2:5). The reason is quite simple: the poor have little in this world to distract them! They

have nowhere else to turn. They have no other hope, but to hope in God! The rich, on the other hand, have the worries of the world upon their hearts. How easy is it for them to place their hope upon the uncertainty of riches (1 Tim. 6:17), rather than upon Jesus Christ. With nowhere else to turn, the church often becomes a refuge for the poor and needy (which was the situation of many of the slaves in Paul's day). And so, it makes sense for Paul to take extra space in his epistle to address the particular situation of those who experienced slavery in Colossae.

But, on top of the sheer numbers of slaves in Colossae, there was certainly another factor going on historically when Paul wrote this letter. We see in chapter 4 and verse 7, that Paul had planned on Tychicus bringing this letter to those in Colossae. When he arrived, he would make known to those in Colossae of Paul's circumstances: how he is doing, and how the Lord's work is progressing. But, Tychicus wouldn't be alone. He would be coming with a friend, whose name was Onesimus. Paul called him, "our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number" (Col. 4:9). Both of them together would inform those in Colossae of the entire situation with Paul in prison.

The name of Onesimus should ring a bell for you. The entire epistle of Philemon was written about this man. He was a runaway slave. Philemon was his Christian master, who probably lived in Colossae. For some reason, Onesimus didn't particularly like his situation, and so he ran. In the course of time, he met the apostle Paul and heard the saving message of Jesus Christ. Paul told Onesimus of the creator God, who rules and reigns above. Paul told Onesimus of the fallen state of men, who have rebelled against their creator. Paul told Onesimus of the amazing love and compassion and mercy of God that sent His only begotten Son to save those who were lost in their sins (Luke 19:10). He did this by dying upon the cross. See, when Jesus died upon the cross, he was doing more than dying. He was also taking the punishment upon Himself that our sins deserved. Through faith in Him, we gain His righteousness. It's a mystery that we will never fully comprehend. Nevertheless, it's true. And faith in Jesus Christ is the only way that we may be saved for eternity. When Onesimus heard these things, he believed. He became a Christ-follower. He became a child of God.

One of the implications of being a Christian is that your soul now has a desire to do what is right, and this includes taking steps to deal with past sins. When Zaccheus was converted, he gave half of his possessions away and pledged to return four-fold to any who he had defrauded of anything (Luke 19:8). And with Onesimus, it meant that he would return to his master, from whom he had run away. Onesimus had come to the conclusion that it was wrong for him to have run

away. He was a criminal, who was cheating his master, Philemon, out of the services that were due to him. And now, he was returning. But, he wasn't returning alone. He had this letter, written by the apostle Paul, which he was to deliver to Philemon. The message of the epistle was all about forgiveness and how Christians ought to deal with each other in these regards. It details how Philemon ought to treat this runaway slave, now that he has come to faith in Christ. J. B. Lightfoot well states the situation. He said, ...

[Onesimus] would place himself entirely at the mercy of the master whom he had wronged. Roman law, ... practically imposed no limits to the power of the master over his slave. The alternative of life or death rested solely with Philemon, and slaves were constantly crucified for far lighter offences than his. A thief and a runaway, he had no claim to forgiveness. [\[7\]](#)

One of the great deterrents to slaves thinking about fleeing their master, is the great punishment that takes place when they were caught. It was the hope of Onesimus that he wouldn't be punished, but that Philemon would put the power of the gospel on display in dealing with the runaway slave far differently than was the custom.

Now, this was going to take place in Colossae as Onesimus would return. You can only imagine the sorts of discussion that might take place among the slaves. Some of it would be very profitable for the kingdom, as the gospel would be put on display. Certainly those slaves who didn't believe in Christ would be driven to ask questions like, ... "Why didn't Onesimus didn't get punished as he deserved?" "How can Philemon restore him to his former position?" "How in the world can Philemon and Onesimus appear to be great friends?" Philemon would be able to use this opportunity to explain the transforming power of Christ in their lives. As one who has been forgiven of God, it's only natural to forgive and restore fellow believers. The slaves obviously saw Philemon as a changed man. His faith in God and his love toward the saints had a reputation far and wide (Philemon 5). There was a church that met in his home. He had a close relationship with the apostle Paul (Philemon 17). Now, in this particular circumstance, he was able to show forth his mighty love to God and his ability to forgive this runaway slave through the power of the gospel.

But, as good as that is, there could easily be some problems that would result. Other slaves of Philemon might think that he has now become lenient, which would promote their own laziness. And then the question comes as to how

Philemon was to treat these slaves as well. Is he to forgive them all and let them go free? Is he to crack the whip? Is he to show partiality to the Christian slaves? Other slaves with Christian masters, might embrace a similar posture. It might easily lead some slaves into a feigned conversion, knowing that such things might help to release them of their duties. And so, Paul takes a good deal of his epistle to instruct the slaves in how they should behave toward their masters. His instruction teaches the slaves to flee from any appearance of rebellion or laziness. He says, "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality" (Col. 3: 22-25).

The bottom line to these words is that Paul was telling Christian slaves to obey their masters by working harder than they had ever worked before. In the book of Titus, Paul gives a reason why they were to do this. Titus 2:9-10, "Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." As slaves submitted themselves to their masters and sought to obey them completely with all of their heart, they would beatify the doctrine of God our Savior. It would become attractive to the unsaved world. Thus, they would demonstrate how believing in Christ and following him will actually make you a better worker, not a lazy or rebellious worker, who merely wants his freedom. Paul gave the same instructions to Timothy, Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against. And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved" (1 Tim. 6:1-2). As the slaves in Colossae did this, they would demonstrate before a watching world of how following Christ only makes you work harder, especially if your work will bless another Christian. I believe that this sort of reasoning is in Paul's mind as he wrote these words to the church in Colossae.

Now, when you think about slavery, your first thought may well be of a man being brought over on a ship from Africa against his will and being forced to work in a cotton plantation in the south. You may well think of a situation in which the slave is overworked in the hot sun. He is fed only minor rations and sent to be each

night under lock and key. The slave is constantly watched by his superiors and beaten at any stage of disobedience. When you think about such things, it ought to make your blood boil with anger, that people, who are made in the image of God, could be treated so poorly by other human beings. You ought to thank the Lord for such men as William Wilberforce, who worked tirelessly to end the slave trade in England. You ought to be thankful that our country has abolished this practice as well. Certainly, such poor treatment of slaves may have been true in Colossae. Certainly, there were slaves that weren't being treated very well. One historical source described the situation in the most desperate of circumstances, ...

Slaves ... were in a much worse state than any cattle whatsoever. They had no head in the state, no name, no title, or register; They were not capable of being inured; Nor could they take by purchase or descent; They had no heirs, and therefore could make no will; They were not entitled to the rights and considerations of matrimony. ... They could be sold, transferred, or pawned, as goods or personal estate, for goods they were, and as such they were esteemed; They might be tortured for evidence, punished at the discretion of their lord, and even put to death by his authority. [\[8\]](#)

But, as bad as this sounds, it wasn't the experience of every slave in the Roman empire. There were also slaves that were treated very well. There were some slaves who were educated. They were teachers. They were doctors. They were skilled workers. They were craftsmen, librarians, accountants, builders, tutors, cooks, and salesmen. Being a slave carried with it some benefits as well. A master would feed his slaves. A master would provide places for the slaves to live. In some instances, slaves were permitted to purchase their freedom, but chose not to do so, because their living arrangements were quite agreeable to them. Another historical source put forth a view of slavery in Paul's day that is different than the one above. This writer writes, ...

While an individual was a slave, he was in most respects equal to his freeborn counterpart in the Graeco-Roman world. ... By the 1st century A. D. the slave had most of the legal rights which were granted to the free man. Many had a considerable amount of money at their disposal and had rights to wife and family. In A. D. 20, a decree of the Senate specified that slave criminals were to be tried in the same way as free men. Sepulchral inscrs. of the 1st and 2nd centuries indicate the prosperity and family solidarity of the imperial slave. Many had a considerable amount of money at their disposal and had rights to wife and

family. In A. D. 20 a decree of the Senate specified that slave criminals were to be tried in the same way as free men (Just. Dig. 48.2.12.3). Pliny the Younger treated the wills of his slaves as valid on the ground that the master's house was the substitute for the state (Ep. 8.16.2; 8.24.5). In A. D. 61 the family of a slave owner attempted to use an old prerogative: the execution of all of the slaves of the master, who had been killed by one of them. When the family of Pedanius Secundus ordered this, so great a riot broke out when the report reached Rome that troops had to be called in to quell it, and the slaves were not killed (Tac. 14.42.45). ... The living conditions of many slaves were better than those of free men who often slept in the streets of the city or lived in the very cheap rooms. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the slaves lived within the confines of their master's house. They usually lived on the top floor of their owner's city house or country villa (Col. Phil. 2.67; Colum. Rust. 1.63). ... The slave was not inferior to the free man of similar skills in regard to food and clothing. ... The free laborer in the NT times was seldom in better circumstances than his slave counterpart. [\[9\]](#)

These are two diametrically opposed testimonies as to what slavery was like in the days of the apostle Paul. How do you reconcile them? I believe that the key is realizing that not every circumstance was the same. Surely, there were slaves who were treated very badly. Surely, there were slaves who were treated very well. It all depended upon the master and upon the slave. Some cases were very bad, rivaling the slavery in our country 200 years ago. Other cases were very good. However, regardless of the circumstances, slaves were instructed to give wholehearted obedience to their earthly masters (as in our text this morning). Paul's counsel was the same as Peter's counsel, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable" (1 Peter 2:18). Peter recognized both the good and the bad master. And yet, the slave was called to demonstrate his submission to his master by obeying him completely. Indeed, this is my first point, ...

## **1. Slaves, Obey Your Masters (verses 22-25).**

Now, this is difficult for us to apply, isn't! None of us in this room are slaves. I choose this point because of how I have chosen to approach the other passages in this section. I trust that you remember when we were in verses 18 and 19 (dealing with wives and husbands), the application was obvious. The points of my message that morning were as straightforward as could be: (1) Wives, Submit to Your Husbands (verse 18); (2) Husbands, Love Your Wives (verse 19). I sought to

spend half of my message speaking directly to wives, and the other half speaking directly to the husbands. When we were in verses 20-21 (dealing with children and parents), the application was equally as obvious. My points were simple: (1) Children, Obey Your Parents (verse 20); (2) Fathers, Encourage Your Children (verse 21). I worked very hard during that message to address the children in our congregation, preaching a children's sermon to them. I also sought to specifically address the fathers, after I finished with the children. I wanted to continue that approach this morning as well. And so, for this reason, we have come to our first point: (1) Slaves, Obey Your Masters (verses 22-24).

I trust that you can see the difficulty this morning. The last thing that I want is to see all of you zone out, because you are neither a slave, nor do you have slaves as well. You might think that this message doesn't pertain to you. Before you tune out this morning, let me simply say that it does have application for you. Though these verses may be particularly addressed to slaves, it does have bearing upon our lives.

I believe that they are directly applicable to any of you who are employed. Just as a slave was called to obey his master, so also are you called to obey your boss in all things. Consider your employment: You have voluntarily entered into an agreement with your employer. You put in your work; he gives you money in return. Should you grow to be unhappy in your working environment, you are free to quit. You can look for employment elsewhere. Should you think that you deserve a raise, you are free to ask your employer. Equal opportunity laws are available for you to use as is appropriate. For slaves in Paul's day, it was much different. There were no laws restricting what could and could not be done by slaves. There was no potential for a raise. There was no opportunity for quitting. Your working arrangement was probably not your choice. Over all, this means that your employment situation is far better than the majority (if not all) of slaves in Paul's day. And yet, Paul called these slaves to "obey those who are your masters on earth" (verse 22). I would argue that if slaves in Paul's day were expected to live this way toward their masters, I believe that all of you who are employed are to follow these same principles.

But, I don't think that the application merely ends with an employer/employee relationship. There are words here that seem to go beyond this sort of arrangement. Look particularly at verse 23, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." This verse seems to encompass all of our work, whether this is as an employee, or as a homemaker, or as a student, or as child at home doing chores. The emphasis here appears to be upon working as for the

Lord, in whatever you do. Yes, this is addressed to slaves. But, I believe that the words to slaves is applicable toward us in all of our work, whether we are the major breadwinner in the house, whether we are a college student studying our schoolwork, whether we are a child picking up the toys in our room, whether we are a mother changing diapers. And so, I simply ask you to apply these things in your particular circumstances. As we journey through this text, looking at a few ways in which slaves were called to obey, I trust that the Holy Spirit will apply the particular applications of these things to all of you in your particular situation.

Slaves are to obey, ...

### **1. Completely (verse 22a).** [\[10\]](#)

Paul writes (in verse 22), “Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth.” I’m simply picking up the phrase, “in all things.” Paul gives the slave here one choice: he must obey. There are not wiggle words here. He doesn’t say, “Obey your masters in some things.” Nor does he say, “Obey you masters in most things.” He doesn’t say, “Obey your masters, unless you are tired.” Or, “Obey your masters, if the work they call you to is reasonable.” Or, “Obey your masters, if they are treating you fairly.” Or, “Obey your masters, if you really feel like it.” Or, “Obey your masters, if you think that it’s really going to help accomplish the overall job.” Like the command to children (in verse 20), it’s a call to complete obedience: “In all things.” In fact, the words are identical to the words in verse 20, *upakouete kata panta* (*hupakouete kata panta*). Like the call for children to obey, so also should our work be characterized by “first time obedience.” When someone in authority over us (whether it’s a parent or an employer or a teacher) makes a request, it should only need to be said once, because we are obedient in all things.

Furthermore, this has implications on the quality of work that we do. We perform our work completely. We finish our tasks. We don’t delay in getting our work done.

Slaves are to obey, ...

### **2. Sincerely (verse 22b).**

Paul writes that our obedience is “not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart” (verse 22b). The idea here is that the slaves of Paul’s day were to obey whether their master was around to watch them

work or not. Their work wasn't merely to be on the surface for everyone to see (i.e. "external service"). Rather, their work was to be motivated from within. It was to be done "with sincerity."

This phrase translated, "external service" is literally translated in the ESV, "eye-service." In the footnote to the NASB, it is translated "eyeservice" (i.e. without the dash, thereby creating a new word). Paul created a word here that had never before been used in the Greek language. The idea is that we aren't merely to be obeying only when the authority is looking. We shouldn't be "eyeball servants." Rather, our work should be done with a sincere and earnest heart, whether anyone is looking or not. The big test here is whether or not your actions change when the boss (or coach or mother or friend or police officer or pastor) begins to watch what you are doing.

A boss one time tracked down one of his employees to ask him, "Jones, how long have you been working here?" Jones replied, "Ever since I heard you coming down the hall." That's eyeball service. Eyeball service is the employee who complained, "I'm so nearsighted I nearly worked myself to death." His fellow employee responded, "What's being nearsighted got to do with working yourself to death?" The employee responded, "I couldn't tell whether the boss was watching me or not, so I had to work all the time."

Paul is telling us to read small print in dim lighting, so that we develop nearsightedness as well. See, God calls us to work hard with a heart that doesn't concern itself with who is looking at us, which leads us to the next point. We don't need constant supervision. We don't need the constant reminders, which leads to the next point, ...

Slaves are to obey, ...

### **3. Reverently (verse 22c).**

The very last phrase of verse 22 shows this. A slave's work was to be done "with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord" (verse 22c). The contrast here is between working "to please men" and working in the "fear of the Lord." Paul was calling the slaves in Colossae to work as mindful of the ever-present eye of the Lord. In Proverbs 15:3, we read that "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good."

As we do our work reverently for the LORD we have no need to worry about the eyes of men -- when others are watching us and when they aren't, because we

know that the eyes of God are always upon us. If your actions change when the eyes of others are upon us, it demonstrates that you don't live reverently enough. The fear of the Lord isn't taking the prominence that it ought to take in your life.

Slaves are to obey, ...

#### **4. Heartily (verse 23a).**

This is seen in the first half of verse 23, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily." Literally, this means, "from the soul." The work of a slave was to be done with an inner motivation actually desiring to obey. You know as well as I do of the great difference in obeying with a willing heart and obeying with an unwilling heart. If you say to your children, "Hey kids, let's go out and play in the snow and build a snowman!" it is met with spontaneous praise and an immediate dash to put on their snow pants and boots to prepare for the cold. They are quick to reach for the shovels and other tools to help build the snowman. They will hunt down a carrot to use for the nose and some charcoal which would make some good eyes. But, say to these same children, "Hey kids, let's go out and shovel the snow off the driveway!" and you begin immediately with the resistance. Frowns appear on their faces. Complaints of how cold it is outside come from their lips. They begin to explain of how tired they are. Suddenly, you begin to hear of stomach aches.

It all comes back to the heart. Where the heart is willing, the feet are swift. Here in the first half of verse 23, we are called to look at the work before us and enter into it with a ready heart, rather than a heart that is filled with complaining and bickering and arguing.

Slaves are to obey, ...

#### **5. Devotionally (verse 23b).**

By this, I simply mean that we are to work with hearts of devotion to the Lord. You see this at the end of verse 23, "do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." It's not so much that the slaves of Paul's day weren't to serve their masters. Rather, it's that they were to focus their attention upon the Master behind their master, which is the Lord Jesus. The word translated, "master" in verse 22 (and in 4:1) is the same word that is translated throughout the New Testament as "Lord." In a very real sense, those who have come to follow Christ have a new Master, who supersedes all other masters. Paul's instruction to the slaves here in Colossae is to demonstrate for the world to see how following the Lord makes a beneficial impact on following your earthly "lord's"

If I would ask you this morning, “Who is your boss?” What would you say? Certainly, it is fair that you might name the one who is over you at work. Wives, you might say, “My husband, as I labor in the home to serve him.” Children, you might very well say, “My parents or my teacher at school.” But, there is a very real sense where you should say, “Jesus is my boss.” And the way to serve your boss is to serve your Boss. We show our submission to our masters, by submitting ourselves to our Master in heaven. Notice at the end of verse 24, how Paul writes, “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

So, do your work devotionally, as a devoted follower of Christ. In this sense, all of our work is actually worship to our God. To obey our authorities is to obey our Lord. Matthew Henry, “We are really doing our duty to God when we are faithful in our duty to men.” [\[11\]](#) Having this type of attitude will redeem the work that you face tomorrow, when you realize that working hard is your duty before the Lord.

Slaves are to obey, ...

## **6. Expectantly (verse 24).**

This comes in verse 24, “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.” Paul was telling these slaves (who may have had little to look forward to in this life), to look forward to your ultimate reward: the inheritance. Certainly, this would have motivated these slaves, most (if not all) of whom had no earthly inheritance to look forward to receiving. The only inheritance that they could anticipate is the heavenly one, which will be given to all believers some day.

I trust that you remember what Paul has already mentioned in chapter 1, verse 12, “joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.” Through faith in the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Father has qualified us to share in the great inheritance. As we look forward to receiving that inheritance, it ought to lighten our step. This is an easy concept to understand. We see it all the time here on earth. Proverbs 16:26, “A worker’s appetite works for him, for his hunger urges him on.” The paycheck at the end of the week gives endurance to keep on working hard. How much more ought our heavenly inheritance give us reason to labor with all our heart! It’s far better than anything that we have here upon earth. It ought to encourage us to press toward the goal!

Suppose that you could make the following deal: If you would work really hard for the next hour, you will be given a year's salary and the opportunity to spend that year however you wanted: Hawaii, on cruises, in Colorado skiing, ... Now,

such a deal pales in comparison to what our reward will be like in heaven. The Scripture describes our life as a vapor, which we breathe out on a cold day. It is soon gone (James 4:14). The Scripture also describes our inheritance as far more glorious and pleasurable than any experience we have on earth. We hear of pearly gates, golden streets, and the constant presence of the Lord. Such thoughts ought to help you press on to labor hard for your Lord. [\[12\]](#)

Slaves are to obey, ...

### **7. Prudently (verse 25).**

Look at verse 25, “For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.” Christians always live with the understanding that the Lord deal properly with every sin we commit, as well as with every sin that others commit against us. Surely, this was intended to give great comfort to those slaves who were being harshly treated by their masters. They could endure the difficult treatment, because they had their eyes upon the judgment day, when the Lord would pour out the proper vengeance upon their masters. For the Lord says, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19). This is what gives Peter the boldness to encourage those slaves who were being harshly treated by their masters to continue to submit to them. Because (he says), “This finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God” (1 Peter 2:19-20).

But, there was another purpose behind these words as well. They were words of warning to the slave if he should prove himself to be rebellious toward his master. The truth of verses 22-24 were to be taken seriously. We would do well to take them seriously also. God hates rebellion to authority. He loves rightful submission. He will exalt those who humbly submit themselves to the Lord’s plan.

And so, I encourage you, church family, to the extent that you find yourself in a role of submission (at work, at home, at school, on the street driving, as a guest someplace, ...) obey those who are over you (1) completely, (2) sincerely, (3) reverently, (4) heartily, (5) devotionally, (6) expectantly, and (7) prudently. Let’s turn our attention now to chapter 4 and verse 1.

### **2. Masters, Deal Justly and Fairly with Your Slaves (verse 1).**

Look at verse 1, "Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven." These words direct our attention upon those in authority. Those who are in authority ought never abuse their position by unfair, unjust actions toward others. A Christian slave owner should treat his slaves with justness and fairness. Philemon's slaves should have been the most well-treated and respected of all slaves. There was no room here for partiality. There was no room here for showing favorites.

Nothing discourages the people of this world more than when an authority figure shows partiality to his subjects. Children hate it when parents have a favorite child. Students rise up in rebellion against the "teacher's pet." Workers hate it when bosses give preferential treatment.

I remember a time in which I was shown favoritism at work, and it was very difficult for me. As many of you know, I worked in the computer department of a hospital before I became a full-time pastor. My father was a surgeon at the hospital, which helped to give me an in with the administration. One day, shortly after my employment began, the president of the hospital was reading an article about a clinic in Arizona that was completely paperless. All of their records were computerized. Not only the billing, but also the patient care notes were kept on the computer. Back in 1996, this was a big deal. The president of the hospital had a wonderful idea. We would all go and visit this clinic in Arizona! All meant the president, my boss, my father, and me. It was a great opportunity to see a wonderful computer system. But, it was difficult as well. My boss, seeing the partiality, told me to keep quiet about the trip, which wasn't really too difficult. However, there came a day when I had to tell my fellow workers, "Excuse me guys, um, ... I'm not going to be here toward the end of the week. I'm going to Arizona with our boss and the president of the hospital and my father." It was a very difficult time for me in the department, as I was seeking to establish my credibility based upon my qualifications and hard work, and not my in with the administration.

Showing favoritism often makes it more difficult for those in submission. If you are in a position of authority (as a boss, a teacher, a police officer, or a leader of some type of organization), don't abuse your authority by showing favoritism to those under you. Don't grant special favors to those who are serving you. Why? because you are never out from under His authority. Notice the presence of "the Lord" in these verses we have examined this morning. It is mentioned on four occasions as Paul addresses the slaves. It is mentioned once more when addressing

the masters here in verse 1. The repetition helps to bring us back to reality: we are all under the authority of the Lord. So live and so act accordingly.

How appropriate is the title of my message this morning, "Working for the Lord"! May the Lord find us faithful in doing this very thing.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 3, 2006 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, p. 24.

[2] John Calvin's comments on Luke 10:38 in his commentary, as quoted by Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, p. 228.

[3] This quote can be found at <http://www.ushistory.org/franklin/autobiography/page72.htm>

[4] William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 173.

[5] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 1, p. 447.

[6] William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 173.

[7] J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, p. 314.

[8] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 1, p. 447.

[9] Arthur A. Rupprecht, in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 5, pp. 459-460.

[10] I am indebted to Jerry Montano for the verbiage of the first six points of how slaves should obey their masters. He preached an excellent message to the college group of Grace Community Church, called Crossroads. You can find his message here: <http://www.crossroadsministry.net/mp3date.asp>. His message was given on August 10, 2003. I also found some of his examples in illustrating the truth of this passage to be very helpful.

[11] Matthew Henry, as found commenting upon this passage in his well-known commentary. You can find his comments electronically here: <http://www.ccel.org/h/henry/mhc2/MHC51003.HTM>.

[12] The seed for this illustration came from Chris Mueller's message on this passage, which he preached at Faith Bible Church in Spokane, Washington, on May 16, 1999 (which is no longer available on the internet).