

## Slaves, Masters and the Gospel

6.28.09

## Applying the Text in Our Context:

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

*“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. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” Colossians 3:22-4:1 ESV*

**Understanding the Text in its Context:** Paul is describing how “Gospel Activity” plays out in the specific relationships that would have existed in the Roman home. This would have included slaves and masters as part of the Roman household.

*“Slaves...”* Slaves were even lower than children and treated as property. It was countercultural to address them. More than half of the population. Included most of the “professional” class: teachers, doctors, craftsmen, etc.

### **Why doesn't Paul denounce slavery in this passage?**

1. First and foremost, the apostles were primarily preachers of the Gospel not social reformers. Their primary focus was preaching the Gospel.
2. At this point in history, Christianity was a small minority in the Roman world with little to no hope that their position would influence Roman policy.
3. Paul's commands to slaves are not an approval of slavery. He appeals to the transcendent Gospel identity and activity. Ultimately, Christianity subverts it.

*“...obey in everything those who are your earthly masters...”* All-inclusive command; unless it becomes disobedience to Jesus (illegal, immoral, unethical, unbiblical).

*“...not by way of eye-service...”* Only doing things to be seen or when being watched.

*“...as people-pleasers...”* Ulterior motives, hypocrisy. Falling all over the master.

*“...but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.”* Don't just work hard when the eye of your earthly master is on you, but recognize the eye of your Heavenly Master is on you and let that motivate you.

*“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...”* whatever you do, do it for Jesus. The big idea of the passage.

*“...knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”* Esp. great news for a slave with no hope of any earthly inheritance.

*“For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.”* This is not permission to be a bad slave or hate your master.

*“Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”* Also highly countercultural. No other literature like this in the ancient world. Uses the same kind of Gospel-logic he used with the slaves.

### **Bridging the Gap to Our Context:**

By God's grace, in our context, we no longer deal with slaves and masters. The closest parallel we have is the relationship between employer and employee.

1. God cares about our work.
  - a. Work, in and of itself, is not evil. It is good. It existed *before* the fall.
  - b. *Do I see that work, in and of itself, is good and that it matters to God?*
2. Even the most menial work can be offered as worship to God.
  - a. *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord...”* (v. 23)
  - b. *Am I offering my work, even the smallest tasks, as worship to God?*
3. We will give an account for our work and reap a heavenly reward. (v. 24.)
  - a. Eph. 2:8-10. Rev. 20:12-13. Remember, this truth has two sides.
  - b. *Am I working as someone who will reap a reward and give and account?*
4. We need to constantly evaluate:
  - a. The status of our work: “Am I doing my work heartily, as for the Lord?”
    - i. *Am I working as if Jesus is my boss?*
    - ii. *Am I doing my work to the best of my ability?*
    - iii. *Am I doing my work with both excellence and humility?*
    - iv. *What is motivating me to do my best? Fear of God or man? (v.22)*
    - v. *Am I working too much? (What is the idol in play here?)*
    - vi. *Am I putting in a full day's work? Cutting corners? Stealing?*
    - vii. *Are my ethics clearly informed by the Gospel? Do others know it?*
    - viii. *What kind of witness am I? (Do your job if you want to be legit.)*
  - b. Our attitude as a worker: “What kind of employee am I?”
    - i. *What am I known for at the office? Whiner? Complainer? Gossip?*
    - ii. *What is my attitude toward my boss? Rebellion? Teamwork?*
    - iii. *Do I work with or against his/ her authority?*
  - c. Our leadership as someone in authority: “How do I lead my people?”
    - i. *Do I care for my employees as people or property?*
    - ii. *Even in authority, do I lead as someone who is under Authority?*
5. We need to be constantly looking to Jesus as our Perfect Pattern, Payment, and Power for our work.
  - a. Pattern: Hard worker known for His trade. Complete submission to His Master. Gave us the perfect example to follow.
  - b. Payment: He died for all of our sins in regard to the workplace.
  - c. Power: His Holy Spirit empowers us to obey Him work in all areas.

**What is God calling you to change in regard  
to what you have heard today?**

**Are you looking to Jesus as your Perfect Pattern, Payment  
and Power for those changes?**