

Week 10

WORKING IN CHRIST

Colossians 3:22-4:1

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

(Colossians 3:23, ESV)
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Introduction

Despite the fact that most of us spend most of our time working, few Christ-followers know what God expects of them on the job. This passage is one of the clearest, most helpful teachings on the subject in the whole Bible. Again, the Christ-Centered Life impacts every area. The Christ-Centered Life doesn't just happen on Sunday at church, but Monday through Saturday in all the places God sends us.

For many Christ-followers, the workplace will be a key place to interact with those who do not treasure Jesus. Therefore, the way we work communicates more about our relationship with Christ than the things we say. It's not difficult to explain away a Christianity that says one thing with our words but says something else with our work. But if we demonstrate a Christ-Centered approach to work, not only will our lives at work be more fulfilling, but we will also paint a powerful picture to the unbelieving world that Jesus Christ is the most valuable person in the universe.

The truths of this passage apply to any setting where work takes place, even work that isn't considered "typical." Thus, whether you're retired from a career, you're a stay at home mother/wife, or you have some other way that you spend most of your time, this passage still applies.

Remember, the Christ-Centered Life is one where Jesus is the most important relationship and he influences everything we do. Therefore, one of the best ways we can honor him is through the way we work.

Investigation

Read Colossians 3:22-4:1.

1. What does Paul command of slaves? What does he command of masters?
2. What motivations does Paul give for slaves and masters to obey these commands?
3. What is the difference between working “by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers” and working “with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord”?
4. How does the instruction of Colossians 4:1 demonstrate a difference between how Paul viewed first-century slavery and how we view colonial slavery of the 18th and 19th centuries?

Implication

1. Despite the fact that work is such an important part of our lives (in that we spend so much time doing it), it seems like many people significantly dislike their jobs. Why do you think this is?
2. This passage seems to be focused on the motivations behind work. What are some worldly motivations that Christians often adopt? How can we begin to think differently?
3. What was a time that you sensed God's pleasure in your work? What was that like? What can you learn from it?
4. What motivates *you* to work? How can you tell?

Other Issues

When addressing slaves in Colossians, Paul tells them to obey their masters. Does this mean that Paul approved of slavery? Does the Bible teach that slavery is morally acceptable?

Although Scripture does not speak against slavery as such, it clearly speaks against the kidnapping of anyone for the purpose of making him or her a slave (Ex. 21:16). The European and American slave trade that lasted past the middle of the nineteenth century was therefore in clear violation of Scripture, despite the rationalizations of many Christians who were involved in it.

Certain types of non-abusive and beneficial slavery were permitted, or even advocated, in the Old Testament. For example, a thief who could not make restitution could be indentured until repayment was worked out—a plan far superior to the modern prison sentence which provides for no restitution of property or money to the victim or restoration of dignity for the thief. Israelites were allowed to buy slaves from the pagan nations around them (Lev. 25:44), but fellow Israelites could not be bought or sold, although they could voluntarily indenture themselves until the year of jubilee (vv. 39–40). During their time of service they were to be treated as hired workers, not as slaves (v. 40–41, 46). Even pagan slaves were not to be abused and were given their freedom if seriously injured by their master (Ex. 21:26–27). A slave who fled from an oppressive master was to be given asylum and protection (Deut. 23:15–16). A fellow Israelite could not be used as a slave for more than six years, at the end of which he was to be given liberal provisions as a form of severance pay (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:13–14). Every fiftieth year, the year of jubilee, all slaves were to be freed and returned to their families (Lev. 25:10). A slave who loved his master and preferred to remain with him could voluntarily indenture himself for life by having his ear pierced by his master (Ex. 21:5–6). The kind of slavery controlled by scriptural teaching was a blessing to both employer and employee and was a rewarding and fulfilling relation between them.

Although slavery is not uniformly condemned in either the Old or New Testaments, the sincere application of New Testament truths has repeatedly led to the elimination of its abusive tendencies. Where Christ's love is lived in the power of His Spirit, unjust barriers and relationships are inevitably broken down. As the Roman empire disintegrated and eventually collapsed, the brutal, abused system of slavery collapsed with it—due in great measure to the influence of Christianity. In more recent times the back of the black slave trade was broken in Europe and America due largely to the powerful, Spirit-led preaching of such men as John Wesley and George Whitefield and the godly statesmanship of such men as William Wilberforce and William Pitt.¹⁹

¹⁹ John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, c1986). 323.

Sermon Notes