

Colossians 3:22-4:1 — How Does Jesus Change My Work?

December 17, 2017

Good morning. Today is our last study in the book of Colossians for the year since next week is the day before Christmas. We will have one service in the morning at 10 a.m. The message will be “Where was Christ before the manger?” I want us to know what Christ was doing in the Old Testament before he took on flesh in the New Testament. In the evening, we will have a candlelight service at 5 p.m. The next Sunday is December 31. Pastor Jordan and I will have that Sunday off. Pastor Stephen will preach on the prodigal son for both campuses. In January, we will return to Colossians for one week to finish off the book. For the rest of January we will study the short companion letter to Colossians called Philemon. It should take us two weeks. After that we will go Old Testament and study the book of Malachi, which will take us to Easter.

This morning, we are in Colossians 3. In this chapter, Paul shows us how to we live differently because of Jesus. When we ask Jesus to forgive our sin and be in charge of our lives, in the Gospel of John it says we are literally born again. A supernatural transition takes place. We are made into a completely new person. The Holy Spirit of God lives inside of us. The Holy Spirit gives us new desires and a new way of thinking that shadows Jesus’ desires and Jesus’ way of thinking.

For the last few weeks in Colossians 3, Paul told us to live out the new person of Jesus living in us. He tells us to simply live like the new people we are. Don’t go back to acting like the old person you were. Paul then taught us how Jesus changes different areas of our lives. He told us that Jesus changes our

character. Jesus changes the way we live in marriage. Last week Paul taught us the way Jesus changes our home and the way we parent. This morning, we will see how Jesus changes the way we work. Christian employees and bosses are different because we have Christ living in us. Let's read the text and see how God changes us on the job.

Bondservants, 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. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 3:22–4:1 (ESV)

I want to teach this passage a little differently than I would typically approach a text like this. This sermon will be two small sermons. I will spend the first half of the sermon dealing with the first word, the word bondservants. I will spend the second half of the sermon handling the rest of the text.

Some of you have translations, like the ESV, that use the word bondservants. Others of you have translations, like the NIV84, that use the word slaves. Many people that have not done in-depth study on the topic of slavery in the first century, get hung up on the word slavery. It appears that the Bible condones slavery. This is one of the reasons many people reject the Bible. Since the Bible appears out of touch on the issue of slavery, why should we trust it in other areas such as the place of men and women in marriage and the church?

For some, when the Bible appears to endorse slavery, they use this as a reason to reject the Bible lock-stock-and-barrel.

This morning, before we go further, we need to understand the topic of slavery in the first century world when the New Testament was written so we can understand why Paul appears to have endorsed it.

American slavery and ancient slavery were different.

The reason some translations use the word slavery is because modern slavery is the closest cultural equivalent we have to reference the institution of slavery in ancient Rome. The problem is when we think of slavery, we think of American-style slavery that resulted in the civil war. That was a brutal style of slavery that treated human beings like animals.

Roman slavery was different than American slavery. I will detail those differences in a moment. Since slavery in Rome was not like American slavery, other translations use the word bondservant to show there is a difference. The problem is nobody today knows what a bondservant lived like. If I was to ask you to describe the life of an ancient bondservant, most of us couldn't do it. In short, there is no perfect English word to translate the category of Roman slavery in the first-century world without producing misunderstandings. That is why some translations use the term slaves, while others use bondservants.

The Bible condemns American-style slavery.

The kind of slavery that took place in America is clearly spoken against in the Bible. American-style slavery is called slave trading or enslavers.

...understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine... 1 Timothy 1:9–10 (ESV)

In 1 Timothy, Paul listed gross, over-the-top sins. They are sins the Old Testament law was created to curb. His examples of over-the-top sins include those who practice homosexuality, and those who are sexually involved with people outside the marriage covenant, that is premaritally or extramaritally. His list includes those who physically strike their parents instead of honor them. He also included enslavers. Some translations say "slave traders." Slave traders were people who sailed ships to Africa. In the middle of the night they raided homes and took husbands, wives and children into captivity. They forced them into confined spaces in the hull of a ship for months at a time to take them to a foreign land. They sold off husbands, wives and children, breaking apart families. When their slaves rebelled, they whip them into submission. Those were the deeds of a slave trader. The Bible says that is one of the most heinous sins. That was American slavery. The Bible does not condone American slavery. It condemns American slavery and calls it one of the great sins against God. The kind of slavery or bondservant life that Paul talked about in these verses is not the slavery of a slave trader.

In addition, American slavery was almost entirely racial. Ancient Roman slavery wasn't racially based. American slavery didn't consider slaves fully human. If you remember from your American government class, slaves were only given 3/5 representation under the law.

Some people claim the Bible has a low view of humanity because it doesn't condemn slavery. They claim we have a high view of people today because we don't tolerate slavery. Actually the opposite is true. According to the

Bible, there is God, man and animals. Man is different from animals because we are created in God's image. No matter what our race, color, age, mental capacity or country of origin, all of mankind is created in the image of God and has dignity, value and worth. Modern evolutionary thinking says no God exists. Evolutionary thinking says there is only a continuum of animals. Some animals are more highly evolved than others. Man is just a highly evolved animal. Some human beings are more highly developed than other human beings. Since some human beings are more highly developed, they can treat the less developed human beings like animals, because that is what they are. Evolutionary thinking says there are sophisticated and highly-evolved human beings, then there are the savages, which are closer to animals. It is evolution that allows you to rationalize having slaves and keeping them in the cargo hold of a ship like an animal for months because your slaves are not humans. They are animals. That is why slaves were only given 3/5 representation.

Evolutionary thinking is what leads to racism and discrimination against people groups. Evolutionary thinking is what allows some people to say other people are not worthy of dignity, respect and value. They are less developed animals. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that man is different from animals. Man is made in the image of God no matter his skin color, age, ethnic background or intelligence. All mankind has worth and dignity, because only human beings were created in the image of God.

In American slavery, humans were considered a master's property. In America, a slave was a slave for life without the chance of freedom. In America,

people left slaves in their wills to other relatives when they died, just like they left their livestock and property to relatives when they died. In addition, when your slaves had children, their children were considered your property, just as when a cow had a calf, it was considered the property of its owner. Let me be clear, the Bible does not approve of American-style slavery. It condemns slave trading as one of the worst of sins.

The closest thing we have to American style slavery in our country today is sex trafficking. This is when young women are taken captive. They are forced into slavery for the pleasure of others. Those young women are not considered people. They are considered objects to be used. The Bible condemns American slavery just like it condemns sex trafficking. Both are evil, wicked and wrong because they don't treat people like they are made in the image of God.

Lest we think we have the moral high ground on this over our ancestors because they treated slaves like cattle instead of human beings, we must realize that today there are people we still treat as less than human beings. We have people whom we deny rights under the law. We have people we treat like nothing more than a piece of property to be used and discarded. Who are these people? They are the unborn. Our ancestors treated some people as less than human because they were racially different. In our culture, we treat the unborn as less than human because they are still in the womb. More unborn Americans have died in the wombs of their mothers under our watch than slaves died by the brutality of their masters under their watch. The truth is, we haven't made moral progress. We have only switched those we consider to be less than human.

What was Jesus' attitude toward bondservants?

While it is clear the Bible is completely against slave trading and American-style slavery, what does the Bible tell us about Roman bondservants, which were similar but different to American slaves?

Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 1 Corinthians 7:21 (ESV)

The Bible says if someone became a Christian when he or she was a bondservant, that is OK. If they could gain their freedom, they should seek it. God does not want us living in servanthood to others.

You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. 1 Corinthians 7:23 (ESV)

The Bible also says that if you are not a bondservant, do everything you can to avoid becoming one. God says it is not his desire for anyone to be in slavery to someone else.

If you are a bondservant and you can get out of being one, go for it. If you aren't a bondservant, do what you can to avoid becoming one.

How did someone become a bondservant?

The ancient status of being a bondservant or slave is a complicated category. A bondservant was someone that became someone's slave for a period of years. You bonded yourself to someone to work for him for an agreed upon period of time. It was similar to signing up for the military. For example, you join the military and you are the property of Uncle Sam for six years. In that day, you could agree to become someone else's slave for a period of years. How did people become bondservants?

Debt — Sometimes people became bondservants because of debt. It was an ancient way of handling bankruptcy. If you started a business, you went to someone wealthy and asked to borrow money. Just like a bank, the wealthy man wanted collateral. You could put yourself and your family up for collateral. “If my business doesn’t make it, my family agrees to be your servants for the next four years.” Bondservants were a way of handling bankruptcy and paying back money when you couldn’t pay back money.

Life Disaster — Everybody faces times when the bottom falls out in life. Maybe you are sick and can’t work. Maybe you can’t get a job and you are on the brink of starvation. In the ancient world, there was no social security system to pay your bills and provide for your needs. When you had nothing left, you went to a wealthy family and offered to become its bondservant. The family members took you into their home. They gave you food and shelter in exchange for working to help them for an agreed upon number of years while you got yourself back on your feet.

Prisoners of War — In the ancient world, when Rome conquered a people, they took some of the conquered people and used them as slaves. Prisoners of war were forced to work for Roman citizens for an agreed upon number of years.

Unwanted Children — Last week, I mentioned the plight of the newborn in the ancient world. While they did have abortion drugs in the ancient world, they were expensive. It was more common for a poor woman to carry a baby to full-term, give birth, then the husband made the decision to discard the child because the family had more mouths than they could feed. As I mentioned last week,

unwanted children were typically placed in the fields surrounding Roman cities where the children died of exposure or were eaten by animals. In addition, people of the worst sort of character would patrol these areas at night to find the unwanted children. They would take these children and raise them to be prostitutes or bondservants. If you couldn't buy a bondservant or pay a bondservant, you could take one of these children and raise a bondservant.

The exciting part of this dark scenario is if early Christians found an unwanted child, they didn't pick them up to raise them as slaves or prostitutes, they adopted them into their own families. Early Christians were known for large families because some of their children were the unwanted children that were turned into their adopted children.

Bondservants was a huge group in the ancient world. A third to a half of all people in the city of Rome were bondservants. That is approximately 60 million people.

While American slavery was primarily racially based, bondservants in the ancient world were not racially based. It was economically based. Bondservants were all kinds of people who couldn't fend for themselves so they bound themselves to work as the slave of a wealthy person for an agreed upon number of years.

Bondservants had few rights. If their master was good, life was good. If their master was evil, life was bad.

While American slavery was a lifetime status, most bondservants were freed by age 30. They were typically given some money when freed to help them

start their lives of independence. If a bondservant was able to earn enough money while serving their master, he could purchase his own freedom.

Apprenticing — Becoming a bondservant was also a way that some people learned a trade. It was a way of apprenticing. If you became a bondservant of a blacksmith, you could learn to be a blacksmith.

While the Bible does not condemn ancient slavery — also called bonded servitude — it encouraged people in this category to get out of being bondservants, and if they were free, not to become a bondservant of another. This status of being an ancient bondservant was not all bad. It served as a social security system in the ancient world. While the Bible doesn't condemn ancient slavery or bondservants outright, it sows the seeds which led to the eventual collapse of ancient and modern slavery. Many of those seeds are sown in the book of Philemon, which we will study in January.

Now that we understand ancient slavery — also called bonded servitude — we can get into the text. In short, an ancient slave and master relationship is similar, but not identical, to a modern-day boss and employee relationship. As we study what Paul said, we will use those categories to apply what he said to our workplaces.

How does Jesus change an employee?

1. A Christian employee is obedient to his or her boss.

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters...
Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

Obedience means we get done what our bosses ask us to do. The boss doesn't need to ask you three or four times. A Christian sees himself or herself as

under the boss' authority while at work, so respect the boss and respond to his/her authority.

Obedience means we do not talk poorly about our bosses behind their backs. Employees are known for disliking their bosses. Christian employees do not undermine their superiors either in casual conversation or in intentional work. We have loyalty.

Obedience means we do the job the way our bosses tell us to do it. It is easy for employees to think they know better than their boss about their work. They cut corners or do work they way they want, not the way the boss requires. That is not obedience. Sometimes your boss tells you to use safety equipment. You wear it when your boss is there but discard it when he leaves the job site. That is not obedience. That is rebellion. Christian employees don't act that way. We do what the boss tells us to do, not what we want to do.

Obedience means we are on time. If work starts at 6 a.m., as Christians, we don't want to be late for work. We strive to be on time because we want to obey our boss in everything, even the start time.

Obedience means we do not let our task list grow cold. Each of us has tasks we push off. The problem is, if our boss still needs them done, they need to get done. It is easy to work on the things we want to get done, not the things that are hard to get done. Obedience means we work hard on everything.

Obedience means we go above and beyond the call of duty. A few years ago, I had a friend that worked in the nuclear industry. His nuclear plant was shut down for routine maintenance. His boss asked him to work nights and

weekends until the plant went back on line. He worked for months without a break. I wondered if he would quit. He didn't. Why did he work so hard? He explained that every day the plant was down it cost the company millions of dollars. To stay competitive and keep the plant open, the work had to be done and it needed to be done as soon as possible. As an obedient employee, he was willing to work above and beyond the call of duty when called upon to do that work.

Jesus was an obedient employee of his father, even when his father asked him to go above and beyond the call of duty by humbling himself to take on human flesh and die on cross for our sin. Like Jesus obeyed his father when it was hard to do, we obey our earthly bosses in everything.

2. A Christian employee doesn't just work when the boss is looking.

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, **not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers...** Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

This is gym class. Everybody does push ups when the gym teacher is looking but what happens when he turns his head? Everybody starts slacking. This is working hard when the boss is around but when the boss goes to the next job site you start resting.

A Christian doesn't do on the job what he wouldn't do in his boss' presence. Would you check your Snapchat when the boss is in your presence? No. Don't check your Snapchat when your boss isn't next to you. Would you have a conversation with a fellow employee about your weekend when the boss is around? Don't have a fun but distracting conversation when the boss isn't around.

A Christian employee seeks work, they don't just complete work.

Sometimes our boss asks us to do a job. When we finish the job, we stand around until we are told what to do next. To some degree, that is being an eye-service employee. If we look around, we can see things that need to get done. Do what we can do while we are waiting until our boss tells us the next thing to do.

A Christian employee has a focus on his job, not flattering his boss.

Some people take this the other direction. Instead of only working when the boss is looking, they try to flatter their boss by their words. "Boss, you are the best boss. Can I get you a coffee? I love my job, can I pick up donuts for everyone on my shift?" Christians don't try to impress their bosses by flattering them. They impress their bosses by doing their jobs and doing it well.

3. A Christian employee works without hidden motives.

Bondservants, 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. Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

The word sincere means being honest and straightforward. It means not having hidden motives or agendas. In the office, the Christian focuses on his job and doing it well.

A Christian avoids office politics. Office politics are when you try to make someone else look bad to make yourself look good. Maybe you are working with a coworker on a project. They make a mistake. You tell your boss they made a mistake but you also tell your boss not to worry because you are taking corrective measures. That is office politics. At work, Christians are not

trying to make someone else look bad. They try to make God look good by getting the job done.

A Christian avoids office gossip. This is spreading information about other people that could be detrimental to them and their jobs. Christians avoid gossip at work. They focus on their work.

A Christian employee doesn't bully or backstab.

In Jesus' disciples, Judas was the one who had hidden motives. The Bible tells us he helped himself to the money bag. When it came to extravagant gifts, like the woman that anointed Jesus with perfume before his crucifixion, Judas was opposed to her anointing Jesus because he wanted to sell the perfume and put money in his hands. He was not there to serve Jesus' company. He had a hidden motive to serve himself through the Jesus company. This colored his decisions so he made choices that were best for him, not best for Jesus.

One modern day example where they made a television program of behind the scenes politics is the "Survivor" television program where people are voted off the island. Behind the scenes alliances and manipulation determine who gets voted off, not contestant performance.

4. A Christian employee serves a greater boss.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men... Colossians 3:23 (ESV)

No matter what we do, we remember we are not working for our earthly boss. We are working for Jesus. When I grew up, there was a saying I heard my older relatives use. They would say, "That's good enough for government work."

The idea is that a job can be done second-rate because it was for Uncle Sam. It was a way to justify second-rate.

The problem is nobody is ever simply working for the government. As Christians, we are always working for Jesus. Jesus is evaluating our work. Nobody may notice how we work, but Jesus will notice. The question we need to ask is, "If I was doing this job for Jesus, would I do it better? If I was mowing this lawn for Jesus, would I do it better? If I were plowing this driveway for Jesus, would I do it better?" Many times we slack off in quality and enthusiasm because we don't like our bosses. In those cases, don't work for your boss. Work for the boss that is over your boss in the organizational chart. His name is Jesus.

There is a story of a janitor that cleaned toilets. When somebody saw him work, they noticed he cleaned the back of the toilets. Somebody asked him, "Why do you clean down there? Nobody can see the back of the toilet." He said, "I work for Jesus, and he can see the back of the toilet."

How would our attitude change if we did our homework like we were going to turn it into Jesus? How would we do a sales call differently if we were doing it for Jesus? How would we handle our customers differently if Jesus is watching and evaluating our work? If we would find ourselves working harder or smarter if we were working for Jesus, remember that as Christians, we are working for him.

5. A Christian employee works for an eternal paycheck.

[knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:24 \(ESV\)](#)

As Christians, we are not just working for an earthly paycheck. We are working for an eternal paycheck that Jesus will give us when we stand before

him. Even if we don't think our boss is paying us what we are worth, we work hard because Jesus will one day pay us what we are worth. Jesus is watching how we work. He will reward us accordingly, even if our earthly bosses don't. This reminds us that it is never to our benefit to skimp at work or to do less than our best. As Christians, one day Jesus will reward us for the quality of our work.

6. A Christian employee remembers nobody gets away with anything.

For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:25 (ESV)

Just as Jesus will reward us for how we worked, nobody gets away with anything at work. Jesus is watching, and he will repay us for what we have done. Some of us have experienced being passed over for a job promotion because someone lied about us or smeared our reputation. It may look like they got away with it but justice is never thwarted, it is only delayed. Remember that justice is never thwarted. It is only delayed. Nobody gets away with anything. One day everyone will stand before Jesus and give an account for what they have done in their lives. As Christians, we will be in heaven by the grace of God through Jesus, but we stand to gain and lose rewards based on how we lived and worked for Jesus. Those who do not know Christ will also have their works judged to determine the just appropriate response to their sin in the Lake of Fire.

Enron executives who padded their wallets so they landed with a golden parachute while the workers of the company were penniless will not get away with their crime. Those who play dirty politics to get elected may get elected, but one day they will stand before Jesus to answer for what they have done. When we work for people and they refuse to pay their bills, they may get away with

cheating us but they will not get away when they stand before God. There will come a day when they will wish they paid their bills. There will come a day when everyone who is dishonest or manipulative will wish they had done the right thing.

While God promises to hand out full justice when everyone stands before him, many times God begins to hand out justice against those who are dishonest in business in this life.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. Galatians 6:7 (ESV)

How does Jesus change a boss?

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 4:1 (ESV)

1. A Christian boss treats employees morally right.

The word justice means anything regarding law and morality. A Christian boss provides safe working conditions. He or she protects against the abuse of women. A Christian boss protects against harassment. A Christian boss provides fair vacation time, benefits and a fair wage. Even if the law doesn't require a boss to do something that is morally right, as a Christian, the boss will do what is morally right for his or her workers.

2. A Christian boss treats employees without favoritism.

The word fairly means equitably. The Christian's boss treats his employees equally and doesn't play favorites. He or she doesn't always give some employees the easy jobs and give other employees the hard jobs to make them bitter. A Christian boss strives to be gracious but equal and fair.

3. A Christian boss knows he or she will give an account to God for his or her employees.

Everybody answers to somebody. If you own the company, you will give an account to Jesus for how you treated your employees. Bosses carry a lot on their shoulders as they try to provide not just for their employees but for the families of their employees.

Conclusion

Slavery in the Bible is not slavery as we understand it in America. It was serving as a bondservant. It is working for someone for a period of time. It is similar to an employer-employee relationship today.

As Christians, we let Christ shine through our lives in our workplaces by our obedience to our bosses, the way we work when our bosses aren't looking, the purity of our motives at work by refusing to play politics, by serving our earthly bosses with the quality and integrity we would give Jesus. Lastly, we remember that God will reward us for our work — even if our earthly bosses don't. We also remember that nobody gets away with anything at work. Jesus is always watching and one day everyone will stand before him and be rewarded or judged by him.

This week, may the way we work provide a great witness that Jesus changed our lives. When he did, he changed the way we work.



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