

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

The Christian’s Experience – Putting On: Sanctified Relationships (3:18-25)

A Sanctified Job (3:22-25)

22 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. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Never wanting to present the idea that the Christian life could be reduced down to a simple formula; I yet want to offer you a premise, a biblical premise that appears to us in Scripture and proves itself in experiential practice. The basic premise is this:

Belief → Obedience → Christlikeness

Of course there is more involved for as we noted last week, it is not just belief in anything, or anyone; but rather specifically belief in Jesus Christ. And even that belief is defined for us in the book of Colossians as a recognition and living in light of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. It is knowing that Jesus is God, the fullness of God and the Creator and Sustainer of all things according to Colossians 1:15-17 and because of this supremacy, Jesus is to come to have first place in everything. It is also knowing that Jesus is solely sufficient as our Savior; that God the Father has provided us everything needed to be reconciled with Him and made fit for heaven through the death of His Son on the cross. We read of this in Colossians 1:19-22. This is what it means to believe; to know Jesus is Lord of all and the only sufficient Savior who by His Spirit fits us for heaven.

But how do you know if you believe like this? The next part of our premise is that genuine belief results in obedience; obedience to the commands of Christ. As Jesus said in John 14:15, **“If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.”** True belief in Jesus results in increasing obedience to teachings and practices of Jesus. How do you know if you believe in Jesus? Are you increasingly obeying and practicing all that Jesus commanded? Is your desire to see your life lined up more and more with the character and conduct of Jesus?

This brings us to the final aspect of our premise, that belief results in obedience and obedience then culminates in Christlikeness. This whole process is called “sanctification” – that process whereby we become more and more like Christ in our conduct and behavior. And in case you have forgotten, Colossians 3 presents to us this grand picture of what it looks like to become more and more like Christ; having died to self and the systematic putting off of the old nature; seeing the diminishing of things like immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, idolatry; anger, malice, slander, abusive, unwholesome speech, lying and such as described in verses 5-9 and seeing the replacing of such vices with the Christlike virtues described in verses 12-15 all culminating in *agape* love – that seeking the highest good for another, regardless of the cost and all for the glory of God. The great summary of all of this; and the grounds upon which

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we are to live out all of our earthly relationships is found in verse 17 where we read, **“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks though Him to God the Father.”**

While I know this is all review; may I remind you that this is also the essence of the Christian’s life? Everything we do is to be to the honor of Christ and the glory of God. And, according to Colossians 3:18-4:1, this premise of belief resulting in obedience culminating in Christlikeness is no where more tested and revealed than in our relationships. And so we find Paul walking us through how this process of becoming like Christ is to be manifested in the marriage relationship and in the parent/child relationship in verses 18-21. But becoming like Christ and manifesting Christlikeness is not limited to just the home or to the church, but is also to be revealed in the workplace. And that is what we find in verses 22-4:1. In other words, if you want to know you are progressing in Christlikeness, what are your attitudes and actions toward your employers?

Before we look at this, let me qualifying adjustment to our examination of the text. Verse 22 begins with “Slaves” and chapter 4:1 with “Masters”. Such terminology grates against our thinking. We regard slavery as wrong and often of masters as being wicked and cruel. The truth of the matter is that the vast majority of the people who lived at the time of Christ and Paul were slaves, maybe 75% or more. This was the workforce, the people who did the majority of the work. And while it is true that slaves were regarded more as property than as people, this does not mean that all slaves were treated poorly. Most did well and provided for their families. Many slaves, while regarded as property, were treated well even as someone might take care of their homes or cars today.

That not all slaves were treated poorly seems to be expressed by Peter when he affirms what Paul teaches in our text and yet adding what appears to us to be a bit disturbing exhortation, **“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle [affirming that many were like this] but also to those who are unreasonable (1 Peter 2:18).**

Since this time of overwhelming slavery, we have the privilege in living in a more “free” society; which doesn’t really mean that we are not slaves or servants, but rather that we have some degree of choice in whom we will offer our services to. If we like computers, we offer our services to a computer firm. If we like medicine we offer our services to a hospital. If we like numbers we offer ourselves as accountants. And for some, we simply offer whatever we have to whoever will pay us the most. But the moment we offer our services, we become servants. And so, in principle, we can replace the word “slave” in our text with “employee.” This means that our point of study this morning is simply this; what does becoming like Jesus Christ have to do with the workplace? Should the Christian and how can the Christian make wherever he or she works a place of manifesting the character and conduct of Christ? I would like to explore this by seeing from our text three applications every employee is to make in his employer followed by two applications every employer (at least Christian employer) is to make toward his employees. From these applications we see this ongoing premise of belief in Jesus resulting in obedience to the command of Jesus, culminating in becoming more and more like Jesus in character and conduct. Every Christian employee or employer has the opportunity to manifest Christlikeness if he will apply these things:

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I. Employees are to know the measure of their service (3:22a)

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth...

The command given here is all-inclusive, “slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth.” To begin with, let us note that the word “obey” is the same word we studied in verse 20 where children are called to be obedient to their parents. Let me remind you of what this word means. Literally it means “to hear under” and to provide insight we defined “obey” meaning “to listen attentively to an authority for the purpose of accurately doing what is heard to the glory of God.” What is good about our definition is what it tells us about the measure or extent of our obedience as employees. Obviously when Paul exhorts that “in all things” slaves are to obey, he means only to the extent such things do not contradict the revealed will of God. And, in context, it would mean to be committed to all things pertaining to the job at hand. That in every way, and in everything, the believer in Christ is to obey his employer.

Very practically that means that as an employee, it is incumbent upon you to know your job requirements and expectations. Do you know what is expected of you? If not, find out because you are to do your job to the very best of your abilities. Additionally, you need to know your boss’s expectations. With these two things known, what Paul is commanding here is this; it is the Christian’s duty to meet and to exceed the expectations of his job description and of his boss.

Are you a faithful and diligent model of Christlikeness in your job? Are you seeking to meet and exceed your job’s and your boss’s expectations? Do we have an example or precedence for this? Consider Joseph in the book of Genesis. Sold into slavery by his brothers, he found himself in Potipher’s house and this young man exceeded Potipher’s expectations and was in charge of all his household. After a conspiracy against Joseph by Potipher’s wife, he found himself in prison, where the prison guard gave Joseph new responsibilities. What did Joseph do? He exceeded those expectations. Finally, Joseph was brought before the most powerful man on earth, Pharaoh and was given a new job description and once again Joseph exceeded all expectations.

Beloved, for the hours that you find yourself at work, your time and your talents belong to your employer. Unlike most of the people to whom Paul wrote, we live in an age where if we don’t like our employer, we can change jobs. But here is the truth and challenge. A believer has no right and cannot honestly complain about his employment if he is to live according to this text. A believer must not be lazy, do mediocre work and yet expect to be blessed by God. The measure of your employment is this, “how would Jesus do your job?” Your employer deserves, because God commands it so, diligent, loyal service from you so long as you work for him.

II. Employees are to know the manner of their service (3:22b-23)

...not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men...

Not only are we to know the measure of our service as employees, but we must next know the manner of our service as employees. Our text reads that such work is, “**not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men...**”

The manner or means by which we offer our service is first of all, “not with external service...” or literally “eye-service” or better yet, “not with service that requires constant watching.” The point being made is that your service is to be just as diligent and industrious

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when the boss is away as when he is looking over your shoulder. Contrary to the ways of the world, the believer should need no other motivation to do his best at his job other than this command by which he knows that the Lord is always watching. Too often we work for show. We want to be recognized and accoladed and so we can often make sure we do better when we are being watched to that end. But the believer must strive to be the best, most trustworthy, most loyal and most dedicated person on the workforce. As we will come to see, the issue is this; do you recognize your job as coming from God and therefore with dedication and devotion, you strive to do your best because your ultimate concern is not disappointing God? If this is not your goal, then you are merely pleasing men and do not fear the God who put you where you are. Always know that regardless of whether your boss is watching you, God is watching you.

And so, Paul exhorts, **“whatever you do”** - again, all-inclusive; when the boss asked you something, don't say, “That's not my job”; don't go around complaining about extra duties and projects; rather, **Whatever you do...** Notice that the command here is not “Make yourself indispensable to that you will get promoted.” Nor does he say, “Develop your skills!” Nor does he say, “Maintain your Christian testimony.” These are great things but the goal for which the believer strives is this, that whatever he does... **“do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men...”** Don't do your job for the boss; don't do it for the promotions; do it for Christ. Keep your eye on Christ. Your boss may be fair or unfair, a bully or benevolent – it does not matter because the one you are working for is Christ – therefore the manner or how you work ought to be governed by how you would do this job for Jesus.

If you clean houses, pits, factories, you are cleaning for Jesus. If you screen and evaluate people for safety concerns, you do it for Jesus. If you count numbers, chickens, or beans; count them for Jesus. If you dig a hole, lay concrete, hand out chicken sandwiches or work on computers; do all such things for Jesus.

III. Employees are to know the motive of their service (3:24-25)

24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

Not only are employees to know the measure and manner of their service, but finally, they are to know the motive of their service. It is amazing what we find in our text here; as we work our jobs, we are to keep three things in mind.

First, never forget eternity in your job. Notice how verse 24 begins, **“knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance...”** We often make a distinction between what we call secular work and sacred work. There is that job we have in the world, that seemingly does not do anything for us except earn us a paycheck, and then there is that work we do for God; raising a family, teaching a Sunday School class; working on the church building. But God does not make a distinction between secular and sacred. According to our text, everything we do, all of our work is elevated to the plane of eternity and all of our work will be evaluated by the Lord; judged by Christ and rewarded accordingly. As one has said, *“There will be a reward for the man who followed the plow, just as the man who filled the pulpit. There will be a reward for the man who worked in the factory, just as for the man who went on the mission field. There will be a reward for the man who gave his life to science, just as for the man who gave his life in sacrifice. Not for nothing did the Lord of glory sanctify human labor when He entered into human*

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life. Not for nothing did He toil year after year at the carpenter’s bench in Nazareth. All diligent, faithful service, done as to the Lord, will be acknowledged in the crowning day that’s coming by and by – acknowledged and rewarded by One who chose to spend most of His life in a shop as a working man.” Beloved, keep eternity in mind as you work.

But not only is eternity to be in view as we work, but also evangelism. The end of verse 24 says, “**It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.**” Never forget that you are actually employed by Jesus. Will you not do your best for Him? Will you not work a full day for Him? How would you do your job if your company president, or manager, or foreman was just down the hall in the office? You are to reflect the values and virtues of your employer; the Lord Jesus Christ. The way you do your job is a reflection upon the extent of your faith and trust in Him. And so, while other co-workers may see in their boss the most unfair, bigoted, sarcastic person ever; you are to respect and honor that person even as would Christ, for it is the Lord whom you serve.

And finally, verse 25 expresses to us what is to be our ethical concern saying, *For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.* What does this mean? Plain and simple; exemplary effort will be rewarded; but haphazard and half-hearted work will be punished. This is our ethical standard, set by the Lord. This is true for believers and unbelievers. Let us never forget that while salvation is always on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone; judgment, the evaluation of any person’s efforts, is always based upon works; good or bad. The believer will give an account for every word that comes from his mouth as well as be rewarded for how he built upon the foundation of Christ in his life. The believer’s work will be judged according to 1 Corinthians 3 and the unbeliever’s work will be judged according to Revelation 20. The believer is assured heaven because of faith in Christ; but what he did for Christ while on this earth will be judged. And the unbeliever is assured hell because even while he may have done some good things on this earth; no man could ever do enough to earn heaven and all his bad works earn him hell. Because of this, how ought you to live your life? For as Peter put it in 2 Peter 3:10-12

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

The ethics that drives the believer, that motivates the believer is that his works will be evaluated by the Lord; his efforts are to be as unto the Lord in all things and with a view to eternity.

IV. Employers are to know the Master’s expectation (4:1)

Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Finally then, let us look at the word given to “masters” or in our case, employers. There are two points to be made from our text. The first is this, that employees are to remember that they are given authority from God. “**Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness...**” According to our text, while employees have a duty to offer to their bosses their service, loyalty,

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trust and diligence; the employers also have a God-given responsibility. Workers have a right to justice and fairness. While the employer has the right to expect the best work; a full day’s work for a full day’s pay. The workers have a right to fair pay and good working conditions.

In Luke 10:7, our Lord Jesus laid down a principle for employers saying, “**the laborer is worthy of his wages.**” The point is that employers, as those who have some power over their workers work conditions and their pay, must make every effort to “do right” [justice] by their employees and to be fair [treat properly] to them. While not many of you are employers and might have a hard time convincing some of the people you work for of these things, what is being taught here is that employers out to ask themselves, “What kind of employer would Jesus be?” I wonder if Jesus had ever needed to hire help for his job as a carpenter, what would it have been like to work for Him. Do you think the pay would have been fair? Maybe even generous? How would Jesus had treated his employees? Would he had been interested in their personal lives and welfare? Of course. And this is the example for Christian employers to follow.

But while employers have this authority to determine times and wages for their employees, they must never forget that they are also and always under authority themselves. The rest of verse 1 says, “...**knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.**” Every Christian employer has the opportunity to be a picture of Christ to all who work for Him and to reveal that the decisions he makes are directed by His own Master in heaven and that the way he treats his employees is in a manner consistent with how Jesus treats His own people.

Beloved, as employees and employers seek to live by these principles, they demonstrate the character and conduct of Christ. They reveal in their jobs that their belief in Jesus as the supreme and sufficient Lord and Savior results in their own obedience to Him and all this culminates in Christlikeness. May each of us strive for such Christlikeness, especially those who are in the workforce.

Soli Deo Gloria

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