

“Relationships Submitted to Christ” (Colossians 3:18-4:1)

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You may be familiar with the 1998 Jim Carey film called *The Truman Show*. The movie centers on the life of a man named Truman Burbank, who from birth is raised inside an artificial world. Everything around Truman is just an extremely large television set. Everyone participating in this world is an actor except for Truman himself, and Truman is the unwitting star of the television hit, *The Truman Show*.

The film climaxes with Truman’s realization of the nature of his false identity in this false reality and his dramatic decision to walk through an exit door to begin a true life with a true identity.

Imagine what that would be like. Imagine you’re Truman. All your life, you’ve lived one way with your family, home, and workplace. A door is opened for you, and you step into a new world where *everything* changes.

At this point, Truman’s very identity changed and implications were profound, touching every area of his life.

Consider this. If you are a Christian, your very identity has changed and the implications are profound, touching every area of your life.

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Over the last few weeks here at KingsWay, we have been examining Colossians 3 in what it means to “put off the old self” and “put on the new self.” (Colossians 3:10) Without Christ, our relationships in particular are a mess. There’s a lot we need to put off.

Just think about this with me. Without Christ, we are unsubmitive, unloving, harsh, disobedient, provocative, discouraging, misguided, self-serving, unjust, and unfair. That’s our lives before we experience walking through the doorway, through the gracious gift of salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

With Christ, our identity has changed. And as we live out this new identity, we are called and equipped to put on “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...” (Colossians 3:12)

And let’s be honest: it is not all that difficult, as a believer, to affirm God’s call for us to

show compassion or kindness or to forgive, right? We're great at obeying these general calls to virtue, right? At least, according to our own judgment. But what about when Scripture starts meddling in our personal relationships? When Scripture starts to get specific with how these virtues should be expressed in our home and in our family and in our work?

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ROADMAP

Today's message is titled, "Relationships Submitted to Christ."

Why did Paul add these specific instructions in Colossians 3:18-4:1? He could have limited his teaching to general Christian virtues like in the preceding verses, but he didn't. As he considers where the ascended Christ is, chapter 3 verse 1, seated at the right hand of God, he wanted to communicate a central point in these 9 verses, and this is the main idea of today's message.

Here it is:

Everything in our life – including marriage, parenting, and work relationships – ought to be gladly submitted under the Lordship of Christ.

We will leave that on the screen for a moment if you want to write it down.

The new spiritual life that Paul's first readers are experiencing comes with being united to a new spiritual family, but that does not eliminate the significance of the Colossians' own physical families and their ongoing relationships. This is where any analogy to The Truman Show breaks down. We don't escape from these relationships in our home and work, rather, how we conduct ourselves in these relationships take on an even greater significance for us as we live out our new identity in Christ.

I've divided our text into three points, corresponding with three sets of correlating relationships that were present in the homes of the Colossians:

1. Marriage relationships
2. Parenting relationships
3. Work relationships

From this text, it's clear that the Colossian believers relate differently after becoming followers of the Lord Christ, so the question that guides our time this morning is this, *How do I gladly submit to his Lordship in my relationships?*

Transition: Question 1...

1. How do we gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ in marriage relationships? (Col. 3:18-19)

This section addresses wives first, followed by husbands. So, let's examine each one at a time.

Look at verse 18:

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

In the Colossian church of the first century, women who married were expected to be the wife of one husband, same as today. And what does the Lord call wives to do in the marriage relationship? To submit. Straight forward enough? Okay, let's move on.

No, of course we must ask, what does Paul *mean* by that?

In the Greek New Testament the word translated *submit* or *subject* can be used forcefully in some places as in **Romans 8:20**, where Paul writes, "For the creation was subjected to futility," or again in **1 Corinthians 15:27**, "For "God has put all things in subjection under [Jesus'] feet."

That's not the use here. This is not a forced submission. Paul's instruction is to submit *oneself*. What's different about that? The emphasis of this word is on the actor's willful yielding, cooperatively putting oneself under the leadership of another person.

To further illustrate this, we can see that this same word is used the same way in **Luke 2:51** when as a young boy, Jesus "went down with [his parents] and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them." It's not that Jesus was forced into submission but rather that he willfully submitted to their leadership.

Wives, that's what Paul means by the instruction to submit: choose to graciously accept your husband's leadership role and humbly come alongside him as a helper, as is fitting in the Lord.

That's what Paul says, *as is fitting in the Lord*. Not as is fitting in first century Roman culture. Not as is fitting in our 21st century American culture. *As is fitting in the Lord*. As

a part of God's redemptive community, we will relate differently in our respective relationships. So, how does a wife relate differently to her husband in her new identity as a Christian? She submits. Not with unthinking obedience to her husband. As a Christian wife, you are ultimately responsible to the Lord. If your husband is leading you to sin or is abusive to you, your submission is ultimately to the Lord, not to that kind of coercive behavior. This submission is not out of passivity or dormancy. This is a thoughtful, active, sincere decision.

More than that, it's a disposition. You could come up with a 100 scenarios and ask the same question: "Do I have to submit here? Do I have to submit there? What about when he does this? What about when he won't communicate about that?" This is not a one time decision. It's an ongoing decision. It's a disposition of your character, of your will.

If you're a married woman and your husband is living, and you're listening to this message, let's get real: deep down, do you find it difficult to do this? Do you find that submitting to your husband is easy or not so much?

The instruction to submit is not limited to submitting to the perfect husband...
It's not limited to when you feel like it...
It's not limited to when he actually had the better idea...

If you're a young woman who is married or hoping to be married, I hope this message presses you in particular to consider what the Bible *actually* teaches about your role in marriage. If you are married, why do you relate the way you do toward your husband?

- Some of us follow what was modeled in our home growing up.
- Others aim for the opposite of what they saw modeled in their home. (I won't ask for a show of hands.)
- We might be surprised how much TV and now social media can affect our views of these things.

Here's my point: Is it possible that your view of your role and responsibility in marriage is different than what the Bible describes here?

If Paul's instruction to submit yourself to your husband is a difficult teaching to accept, kindly allow Paul's explanation at the end of this verse to encourage you. It is fitting in the Lord. It is beautiful. Desirable. Right. Good. Intended for your flourishing and well-being. In this, you reflect the radiant bride of Christ. In this, you reflect the Lord who is Himself our Helper.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

And husbands: now Paul turns his attention toward you.

Look at verse 19 with me:

19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

If you are a married man or a young man who may be married one day: don't sit back. Lean in. The Lord over your life has something to teach you here.

Husbands, (I find myself in this group!) we are given two instructions. One is a positive affirmation and the other is a prohibition. Love your wives AND do not be harsh with them.

First, we should ask, what does Paul mean by the word love? Matthew pointed out last week how our culture's definitions of love are completely out of whack.

What does our culture say love is?

- Love is what feels good.
- Love is self affirmation.
- Love is self expression.
- Love is getting what I want.

That's not love. That's vanity. That's all sinful pride.

What is love?

According to **Mark 12:30**, this kind of love Paul writes about encompasses your whole being. "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." With everything.

It's what John teaches us in **1 John 4:10**, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

That's an all encompassing love. In the Greek, it's *agape* love.

In the original language, there were several words at Paul's disposal he could have chosen. He could have emphasized familial love or the love in friendship or romantic

love, but he didn't. He uses the word that refers to God's covenantal faithful love with his people. It's a self-giving, devoted, whole-hearted committed love.

So, when Paul says, "husbands, love your wives," consider the glorious vision he has in mind. In this redemptive community in the church, husbands who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will do something radically counter cultural.

In the first century, heads of households in that place and time were to keep decorum, keep things in line, keeping things stable for society and for the state. The secular code was never, "husbands, love your wives." But that's exactly what is taught here in Colossians 3.

And in the 21st century, this teaching remains counter cultural. If our culture says love is self affirmation, self expression, and ultimately getting what I want, then hear me loud and clear: this is a different kind of love.

The love God calls husbands to is an unconditional love, meaning, it is not conditioned by how the other person in the relationship has been treating you, what they are giving in return. Husbands, listen. There will be moments, days, even long seasons, perhaps, where your wife will not treat you well. You may feel disrespected. Her behavior may be unlovely, and yet you are called to love her. Loving your wife will necessarily require you to make sacrifices of what you want in order to serve her.

You might be in year 5 or 15 or 45 of your marriage and find that you're struggling. Married men, follow Christ's example and apply this to your relationship with your wife:

Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others [count your wife] more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others [your wife]."

Consider this for a moment: Why does Paul give the exhortation for wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives? Could it be in part that men and women tend to have respective susceptibilities in these relationships?

Husbands in particular are prone to misuse their leadership position, but leadership is not something that should be marked by displays of power but by humble service. Paul makes this clear as he writes the second half of this instruction:

Husbands, love your wives, and *do not be harsh with them.*

To love as God loves means you are to not be harsh with them. Do not be strict and

demanding. What would be the opposite of these things? If you are to “put off” harsh treatment or demanding behavior, what are we to “put on”?

Husbands, I want you to take note of verse 12, just a few sentences before our passage today: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Ask yourself, have you been harsh with your wife? Have you failed to put on...

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience

You may have raised your voice this last week. You may have demanded your own way. You may have been uncompassionate, unkind, proud, harsh, and impatient. Hear the good news: Jesus paid for those failures. If you trust in Christ, your sins are placed on Jesus at the cross. His righteousness is placed on you.

And now, if you are in Christ, He has given you his Spirit to enable you to live out your new identity in Him. As you are clothed in Christ, your character necessarily changes. You are progressively sanctified and become more like Jesus who lovingly sacrificed himself for his bride.

Ask yourself, *am I willing to grow into this kind of Christian maturity?* This model of manliness? This call as a husband to your wife? Will you lay down your life in order to serve her and love her?

And listen, these aren’t the only things that we are called to as husbands and wives, but they are of primary concern to the Lord.

Before we move on to the next point, I want to add one more note: If you’re a single woman or single man who hopes to be married one day, study these verses and the others like them in Ephesians 6, 1 Peter 3, and Titus 2. Allow God’s Word to shape your thinking and character and conduct in anticipation of being married one day. This should change the kind of spouse you look for and marry, and this will change you.

Transition: Question 1: How do we gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ in marriage relationships? In the church, wives humbly submit to their husbands and husbands tenderly love their wives as an expression of their identity in Christ.

Question 2...

2. How do we gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ in parenting relationships? (Col. 3:20-21)

Look at verse 20:

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

When I say “parenting relationships” or “family relationships” I’m going to address parents and children here. And Paul begins with children.

Notice that Paul didn’t write to parents saying, “oh, by the way, tell your children to obey.” He doesn’t use parents as messengers or mediators here. He speaks directly to children. This suggests that in the church in Colossae, children were gathered with the adults. Listen, children can learn under the preaching of God’s Word. They can sing Christ exalting songs. They can respond in faith to Christ, be baptized, and as maturing young adults become covenantal members of the local body of Christ. Let’s not underestimate that children are an integral part of this biblical community. Children are given the dignity of being directly addressed as this letter is read aloud in the Colossian church. And today, I’m going to do the same thing.

Raise your hand if you’re younger than 10 years old. Keep your hands up. Raise your hand if you’re younger than 13 years old. 15 years old. Raise your hand if you’re a child or young person, still at home under the supervision of your parents or a responsible adult.

Let me ask *you* a question (you can put your hands down): How many of you have been told by your parents that you must obey? EVERY. ONE. OF YOU. Every adult here has had that experience too when we were children. You can’t even keep count of the number of times you are given instructions to follow. It can feel a whole lot like your days are filled with being told “do this” and “don’t do that.” Can any of you young people relate to that feeling?

You might find that it is easier to trust that feeling, believing that your parents are out to get you or make your life difficult, than it is to humbly consider what God wants you to do as a child in that relationship with your parents.

Maybe you’ve become discouraged at times, and so obedience is particularly hard for you. What I want to do is point out two things from this verse: 1) what God wants you to do and 2) why he wants you to do that.

What does God want you to do? Look at verse 20, “Children, obey your parents in everything.”

Let’s get practical.

- Let’s say you’re told to get your homework done before any screen time. You’ve gotten most of your homework done and you get on your phone or game system. Is that obeying your parents?
- Let’s say you’re told to wash the dishes after dinner, and you only wash the dishes in the sink and not those on the counter or table. Is that obeying your parents?
- Let’s say you’re told to help your younger sibling with something, and you protest or do so with a poor attitude. Is that obeying your parents?

No. We know what it means to obey, we just have an endless ability to justify our behavior. The teaching is clear: children, obey your parents in everything. Not in some things, not in just the big things, in everything.

Parents, a note to you: don’t miss that this obedience that is required by the Lord is truly a very good thing. It’s God’s very design for families. If you’re a mom with toddlers or young children OR are a parent of rising teens and young adults, it can be easy to become discouraged. The fall of man means that your children have warped wills that often oppose even the best parenting. We can’t escape the reality that this is hard. But it is good. And it’s God’s call for you to train up these children in the way that honors the Lord, pointing them to the one to whom we all ultimately obey.

Children and young people, back to you. We understand the Bible teaches us to obey our parents in everything. But why do we do this?

Verse 20 tells us “for this pleases the Lord.” Think about how God made humans: as babies, we enter the world completely helpless. We need our parents for everything. We need to be fed, rocked to sleep, have our diapers changed. We are completely dependent. As we grow older, we learn to tie our own shoes and pack our own backpack and complete our own homework. Notice something: you being a child under the authority of your parents is God’s very design for families. It’s how we grow up. And when, as children, we obediently submit to our parents’ authority, we honor God’s design and we experience blessing.

It is right and good to obey. While you’re going through your childhood years, it can be easy to think, “just wait until I’m in Middle School or High School or until I’m a teenager

or can drive or turn 18...” You can fail to miss the good of what God is calling you to right here, right now in your family.

Consider the life of Jesus who gives you an example of what it looks like to submissively obey your parents.

- **Luke 2:51**, which I already quoted, describes how, as a 12 year old, Jesus “went down with [his parents] and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.”
- The very next verse tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”
- And **Hebrews 5:8-9** adds that Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered.”

Jesus was submissive to his parents. Jesus learned obedience and grew in wisdom. You need the same thing! You need to learn obedience and grow in wisdom. You need to submit to the parenting God has put in your life.

Think about yesterday. Think about this last week. Have you been obeying? Have you been obeying—in everything?

- When you’re instructed to begin your homework, ask the Lord for help to obey.
- When you’re told to finish your chores before watching a movie, ask the Lord for help to obey.
- When you’re trusted to turn off your game after only an hour of playing time, ask the Lord for help to obey.

Seek to please the Lord. Your obedience to your parents is obedience to the Lord Jesus.

And fathers: now Paul turns his instruction to you.

Verse 21: 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Fathers and mothers, what is your responsibility in parenting? A quick scan of Scripture produces something like this:

- Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
- Deuteronomy 6:6-7 “You shall teach [these words] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

- Ephesians 6:4 “Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Those are the kinds of directions we would expect here. But we get something a little different. It’s a concern borne out of the reality that children can become discouraged.

It’s painful when a child rebels. A younger child may stomp their feet, an older child may mouth off at you, saddest of all is when one chooses to break off from a relationship.

Our culture affirms this kind of behavior as a form of self liberation and self expression and self love. My wife and I watched a show recently where the protagonist said, “I think it must be hardwired into us to reject our fathers.” And in some ways, that’s true. But why is that true?

Dads and moms, is it true that your children tend to push against your authority? Yes? Ever since the fall, humans have a sinful bent, and in children, that’s seen in their willful disobedience to parents.

Consider it this way: a child’s rebellion is the spiritual warzone that parents are in every day. But be careful to discern who the enemy is. Your temper tantrum toddler is not the enemy. Your unmotivated middle schooler is not the enemy. Your uncommunicative high schooler is not the enemy.

Sin is the enemy within.

Do you think that your children can sometimes feel like you’re against them? Consider this: instead of giving a grammatically positive instruction like “love your children,” why do you think Paul writes with negation, “do *not* provoke your children”? (Or in other words, instead of saying, *do this*, he says, *don’t do that*.)

Is it possible that parents can tend to provoke their children?

Notice who this is first and foremost written to – fathers. Dads, you have a particular weight in your relationship with your children. The power balance dramatically favors you. You carry the authority. What you say, how you say it, what you allow, what you don’t allow, how you react, how you discipline... all of these things have incredible potential for good and incredible potential to harm your children. You don’t need to take a popular psychology class to understand this. Scripture gives us a reason why this instruction is so important to your role as a parent. “Lest they become

discouraged.”

Children obeying parents in the Lord is good and right. But parents, watch your life – how you lead your children as a father or as a mother. Apply Paul’s teaching from the previous verses in Colossians 3 to your role as a parent:

- 13 Bear with your children.
- 13 If you have a complaint against one of your children, forgive them, as the Lord has forgiven you.
- 14 Above all, put on love as you relate to your children, as love binds everything together in perfect harmony.
- 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts as you lead your children.
- 15 Be thankful in the midst of your parenting.
- 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing your children in all wisdom.
- 16 Sing songs of worship with your children with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- 17 And whatever you do as a parent, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In the Colossians culture, the secular instruction to fathers would be to rule their households, including their children. Notice that Paul’s choice of instruction here, while in no way exhaustive, is *not* to direct fathers to exercise their authority but to be gentle as they fulfill their duties.

Transition: Question 2: How do we gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ in parenting relationships? In the church, children willingly obey their parents and parents gently lead their children as an expression of their identity in Christ. Question 3...

3. How do we gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ in work relationships? (Col.

3:22-4:1) Paul spends most of his time on this third and last set of relationships.

Without keen discernment in this section, we might find ourselves unnecessarily confused about what the Bible teaches here, particularly related to bondservants and masters as it relates to work. My aim is to guide us in contextual clarity and biblical wisdom so we can be confident in God’s Word and live out our identity in Christ.

Therefore, in this section, as in the last two, we will first be careful to understand the meaning of this passage in its original context, second, consider the timeless principles in what it teaches, and third, consider how we ought to apply this in our context today.

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The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle records what was at the time considered to be the threefold relational parts of the family: “master and slave, husband and wife, father and children.” (Politics) Paul has addressed husbands and wives and fathers and children, so now he turns his attention to the relationship between servants and masters in verse 22 and following.

In first century Colossae, what did it mean to be a bondservant? The term here is translated in different English Bibles as servant, bondservant, or slave, and according to the **Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary**, “Slavery was prevalent and widely accepted in the ancient world. The economy of Egypt, Greece, and Rome was based on slave labor. In the first Christian century, one out of three persons in Italy and one out of five elsewhere was a slave.” This was a significant population with responsibilities ranging from work in fields, mines, building projects and so on, and many were domestic and civil servants.

Servant or bondservant might be the best translation here as Paul is addressing servants in the household of their master. That’s the original context of this instruction.

While the Bible never endorses slavery, it does regulate it just as Moses regulated divorce in the Old Testament. The Bible teaches how servants and masters ought to relate to one another within that institution.

It also may be valuable to highlight how the servitude in view in Colossae differed from chattel slavery in the history of Europe and the United States.

Christian Baker helps us here when he writes, “The slavery of recent centuries—as we know it—*forces* individuals into an oppressive life of unmerciful labor, often with no hope of freedom. This kind of slavery is immoral, dehumanizing, and ungodly and has absolutely no rightful place in this world. Scripture explicitly forbids this kind of slavery. In fact, anyone who partook in this kind of slavery was commanded to be put to death [according to Mosaic law] (Exodus 21:16).”

We don’t have the time this morning to address everything that Paul does *not* say in

this passage or to address all that the Bible teaches related to the institution of slavery.

Suffice it to say, there's a Christ-centered, God-glorifying reason Paul exhorted a master named Philemon to welcome a runaway slave named Onesimus as a "beloved brother," not a bondservant. The collective testimony of Scripture – and the gospel in particular – ultimately sows the seeds of slavery's demise.

Our responsibility this morning, however, is to focus not on slavery in general, but on what Paul is saying about bondservants and masters in this passage, and what the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn from it today.

The very fact Paul addresses the bondservant/master relationship reminds us just how utterly comprehensive Jesus' authority is in our lives as Christians. No relationship is excluded, including relationships we would never choose for ourselves if given the choice.

Think of it this way: We don't get a pass on honoring the Lord just because a certain relationship or structure is marred or deeply corrupted by sin – whether a marriage relationship, a family relationship, or a work relationship. It is our responsibility to discern how the Lord intends for us to live in a way that submits ourselves wholly to the Lordship of Christ in every relationship we are in.

So, let's look at what Paul teaches starting in verse 22:

[22a Bondservants. obey in everything those who are your earthly masters](#)

Notice that the servants here are given this instruction directly through Paul's letter, not by him telling masters to share this instruction second hand. That's significant, same as with the direct teaching to children, because it shows the dignity affirmed in these men and women who are a present part of this new community.

We'll get to the requirement for masters in a few minutes, but let's start here: what is the requirement for bondservants? To obey.

As with the command given to children to obey their parents, so also servants are instructed to obey their earthly masters. Not in some things, not some of the time. In everything. And Paul is about to explain what he means by obedience in everything.

From the second half of verse 22 through verse 25, the timeless principles related to work relationships become clearer, as Paul answers three of the most important

questions you could ask when you are working for someone in any culture at any time in human history. And I have no doubt you'll quickly see how this leads us to apply these biblical principles in our own working relationships today.

Paul answers the following three questions:

1. How are you working?
2. Why are you working?
3. For whom are you working?

Look at the second half of verse 22 through verse 25:

22a Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters...22b not by way of eye-service as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

As we consider these three questions, keep your own work in mind. This section will help guide you as an employee working for earthly employers.

1. How are you working?

Verse 22: *Not by way of eye-service as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart*

True obedience is not found when I fulfill my duty just so I can be seen and praised by my boss at work. True obedience is not found in people pleasing but in pleasing the Lord. It's not found by living in fear of your earthly master but by living in a holy fear of the Lord. The Lord is our ultimate authority, above every institution and every relationship. Thus, obedience should be embraced with a sincere heart.

Verse 23 is even more encompassing: *Whatever you do, work heartily* Heartily literally means out of the soul or from the heart. It's not just a matter of sincerity. It's about giving your best. If Paul were writing today, he might use the modern idiom "Put your heart into it."

Into what? Whatever you do. If you're hanging sheetrock or running wire, do it from the heart. If you're editing something on a computer, do it with your whole being. If you're responding to perhaps even obnoxious customer questions... Whatever you do, do it heartily.

With most any job, there's some things you'll love to do and there's some things that are really hard to do. What kind of attitude does Paul say we should have about both, all? We should work sincerely and put our heart into it.

Transition: So. Question 1 about your work: how are you working? Sincerely or insincerely? From the heart or half-hearted? Question 2...

2. For whom are you working?

Verse 23: Whatever you do, work... as for the Lord and not for men Do we work for human managers and employers? Yes, of course. We clock in and clock out. Our manager says start this project and finish that one, and so that's what we do. The check has the company name and our boss' signature. But ultimately, we're not working for "the man."

I now work for a nonprofit called TeenPact Leadership Schools. My manager is the CEO and above him is our Board of Directors. I must ask myself, in whatever I do, am I working for the Lord and not for men? Oh, I can aim for the approval of man so easily. Can't you? Do you work "as for men" or "as for the Lord"?

Verse 24: You are serving the Lord Christ.

Paul is laser focused on what it looks like to gladly submit under the Lordship of Christ. In the hierarchy of work, Paul has us look to see who is above our earthly master and see that Christ is reigning over us both. And as a believer, you're ultimately serving Christ.

I have worked for a fast food restaurant, a grocery store, a coffee shop, and our church. As a Christian, Paul reminds me that in each role, I am serving Christ the Lord.

Who do *you* work for? Perhaps you have a direct supervisor or manager or business owner who you work with. Now, they might be kind and good at communicating expectations and great at enabling you with the resources you need and very understanding when you request flexibility. But that's not always the case, is it?

Most of us, if not all of us, have experience – even recent experience – with managers and employers who have failed us in some way. If that's you, let's look at Paul's third question about work:

Transition: So, Question 2 about your work: For whom are you working? As for the Lord or for men? You are serving the Lord Christ. Question 3...

3. Why are you working?

I realize that submitting and lordship aren't the most appealing categories for us, at least not naturally. We're immersed in a culture that rejects authority, affirms self autonomy, and views anyone in leadership with suspicion. If we're not careful, we might let that win the day instead of learning how the Bible teaches us to relate in work relationships.

It's here that Paul's teaching is particularly sweet: he gives us hope and confidence as to why we are working:

Verse 24: Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward You can sincerely put your heart into your work as you serve the Lord, knowing that he keeps the receipts. More than that, he's the one who can do something about it. More than that, he's the one who promises to do something about it – he is the one who gives the reward. He's the one who gives you an inheritance.

To the bondservants addressed in Colossae who had no earthly inheritance, this was a sweet promise. Some of you have very little earthy status to point to after years of investing in your workplace.

- Very little recognition even when you've been quite successful in your role
- Few and only small pay increases when you've brought significant value to your company

Listen: there is a reward coming for faithful work that is pleasing to the Lord. It's a sad reality that earthly masters may never provide such an inheritance, but in the Lord, we are promised this vindication.

And Paul takes this a step further in verse 25:

Verse 25: For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Have you been wronged at work?

Has your manager told you one thing and done another?

Have you been treated harshly?

Have you been overlooked for a promotion?

Has someone working for you been dishonest and cheated you or the company? The wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done.

You know how we know that? Because Christ is Lord over that person too. That's what this sermon series points to: Christ is above all. The unjust person will give an account for every wrong, and there is no partiality in God. This points us to the hope we have in work: the Lord promises both a reward for faithful work and a punishment for wrongdoers

Transition: So, Question 3 about your work: Why are you working? Your honest labor will be rewarded by the Lord, and all wrongs will be paid back.

Paul finally addresses masters in the last verse of our section, chapter

4:1. Look there:

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

In the first century, these masters were heads of household, managers over those who served them. I have no doubt that Paul's concern here is warranted. Bondservice means serving without wages. Basic life necessities were provided for these men and women but not much else. Is it possible that in the homes of the Colossians, masters might tend to treat their bondservants with unfair demands and injustice?

The repeated call in the Old Testament is for the people of God to do righteousness and justice. It's what the prophets lament as they see injustice in the land, generation after generation. Paul connects to those themes by requiring that masters treat servants with justice and fairness.

He further directs masters to see that their position is not high and mighty above the lowly servant, but rather that earthly masters also have a Master. We are all under the Lordship of Christ, therefore, masters should treat those in their service with the dignity and respect and righteousness and justice that God requires of them.

Looking at our context today, consider your work if you are an employer or a manager. How do you treat your employees? Their experience should be different because you are a Christian.

Your commitment to do good by them should not be compelled by anti-discrimination laws or minimum wage rising in January. Moreover, Paul does not put the responsibility on the employee to plead their cause. This responsibility is on you as the

owner or manager.

This is an active and ongoing commitment to treat those working for you with justice and fairness. Take time to reflect on this. Consider how you can help your workers flourish as they do excellent work and receive what is well deserved. This is pleasing to the Lord.

Question 3: How do we gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ in work relationships? In the church, employees work sincerely and heartily as for the Lord and employers and managers actively treat their workers with justice and fairness as an expression of their identity in Christ.

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CONCLUSION

Truman Burbank stepped through that door and embraced his new identity. As Christians, we are to do the same. If your identity is in Christ, the implications are profound, touching every area of your life.

1. Marriage relationships
2. Parenting relationships
3. Work relationships

Paul could have kept going! This room is full of differing roles and relationships. The ongoing question for us, is How do we gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ in this relationship and that one and here and here and here.

Everything in our life – including marriage, parenting, and work relationships – ought to be gladly submitted under the Lordship of Christ.

:: pause ::

Let's pray:

- A - Lord over all, worthy of all
- C -
 - Confess where wives have been unsubmitive toward their husbands and husbands harsh with their wives
 - Confess where children have been disobedient toward their parents and their parents and fathers in particular have provoked or discouraged their children.
 - Confess where employees we have failed to work heartily in service to the Lord and employers have failed to provide justice and fairness.
- T -
 - Thank you for where our marriages are strong and where they are being strengthened
 - Thank you for where parents hearts are toward their children and children's hearts are toward their parents
 - Thank you for showing us the deep satisfaction of serving you in our work and the serious joy of providing justice and fairness to employees.
- S -
 - Help wives to grow in humble submission
 - Help husbands to grow in tender love
 - Help children willingly obey
 - Help parents tenderly lead
 - Help us work heartily unto you
 - Help us to do right by those who work for us