



New Life on the Job

[3:22—4:1]

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“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. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

“Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven” (3:22—4:1).

History tells us that one-third of the total population of Paul’s world was in slavery. With 60,000,000 trapped in this institution, few Roman citizens actually had to work. Slave labor was plentiful to work as household servants, workmen in small factories, laborers in the fields.

The attitude of masters toward their slaves was generally an ugly reality. Yarro, who was considered among the more learned of the Romans, once wrote that a slave is no better than a beast of the field who happens to talk. The satirist Juvenal tells of a master who branded a slave because he lost a couple of towels. Cato, the Roman senator, advised a friend to throw his old slaves out on the scrap heap to starve. He said it was sheer extravagance to waste food on old or sick slaves.

The Jewish attitude was not any better. According to the Talmud, “Ten measures of sleep

descended into the world; slaves took nine and the rest of mankind one.” In other words, slaves are lazy! Another Talmudic quote is this: “There is no faithfulness in slaves.” The rabbis were also fond of saying: “The more maidservants, the more lewdness; the more menservants, the more robbery.”

With these kinds of attitudes prevalent in the biblical world, it is not difficult to imagine how slaves felt about their masters and the way they were treated by them. Little wonder, then, that slave revolts were frequent. Among the greatest rebellion was one led by Spartacus in 73-71 B.C. Over 100,000 slaves participated in that revolution, and only a long, bloody military effort suppressed it. Other major and minor revolts dotted Roman history down to Paul’s day; none met with success. Against this horrible backdrop of tension between masters and slaves, Paul has some clear and practical counsel for Christians on both sides of the issue.

Thank God, slavery is no longer a part of our own culture. However, in an age still struggling with labor and management problems, Paul’s counsel has continuing validity for the relationship between workmen and employers.

Following the pattern of the previous verses, Paul first addressed the party who is in subjection. Thus, he began with *a word to slaves*:

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. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; . . . (3:22-25).

Paul had more to say to slaves than he did to any other group he had addressed. That highlights how crucial this matter is. We need to know as workers how to live out our new life in Christ on the job.

THE REQUIREMENT OF OBEDIENCE (3:22)

First, notice the requirement of obedience: "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth . . ." (3:22). "Obey," also used in discussing the responsibility of children, is a combination of the Greek terms for "listen" and "under." It means to "get under the authority of your master, and listen to what he tells you to do." Considering the working conditions of slaves in those days, that is a strong requirement for a resurrection lifestyle!

The application for today is obvious: If you are an employee, you are to obey in everything. Secretaries, complete the tasks your boss gives you. Clerks, do what your manager tells you to do. Salesmen, follow your supervisor's instructions. School teachers, listen to your principal.

But you say: "You don't know my boss!" If you think you have problems, read yourself back into Paul's age. Think about those cruel, callous masters these Christian slaves had to serve. And Paul still said, "Obey in everything." No restrictions were attached to this obedience, no fine print. He did not say, "Do what you have been assigned if it makes sense to you or if it will give you satisfaction." What he said was, "Get under your superior, and listen to what he tells you to do."

If you have new life in Jesus, it ought to manifest itself at your job. Your employer should be able to see in you an employee who follows instructions, a worker who does what he is told the first time.

THE REGULATIONS ON OBEDIENCE (3:22, 23)

Notice the regulations on our obedience. There are two of them. The first has to do with our *attitude*. Slaves (and employees) are to serve "not with external service, as those who merely

please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (3:22b, 23). You are not to be an apple-polisher, working hard when your employer is around but goofing off when he is not. Neither are you to attempt to get by with as little as possible on the job. Your attitude should be one of sincerity; you should desire to give your employer the best hour's work you can for an hour's wage.

That brings us to the *ardor* with which you now do your work. Paul said: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily," that is, give 110 percent. Here is why: "As [working] for the Lord rather than for men."

Go to work every day as eagerly as you would if Jesus were your personal supervisor. Go about your work as if you were typing that letter for Jesus to sign, programming that computer for Jesus to run, building that office complex for Jesus to use.

If Jesus were your boss, you would be willing to obey without argument and without delay. You would give your best all day long. Paul says that is how the Christian who has new life within him will serve his superior.

When Paul wrote to Titus, he shared an additional reason why we should serve with this kind of attitude and ardor: "Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect" (Titus 2:9, 10). If you are a lazy or disobedient employee, if you pilfer office supplies for personal use at home, what will that do for your Christian testimony? It will be destroyed! How can you ever hope to share your faith with your boss, your supervisor, or even another employee if that is the kind of worker you are? You cannot! The only way to effectively open the door for evangelism is for you to adorn the doctrine of God by working in such a way that it shows you are different from other employees.

Incidentally, that is why you are there. You do not work at IBM, AT&T, or Yellow Freight primarily to make money. That is a fringe benefit! Your primary responsibility is to make the gospel attractive to the unsaved. You are God's representative in that office, in that classroom, on that assembly line. You may be His only representative. Therefore, work in a way that will glorify God.

Is there an application you need to make? Do you need to change your attitude on the job? Is there an area of your employment that you need to open up to the control of God's Word within you? What could you do differently tomorrow morning that would demonstrate to your boss and fellow workers your new life in Christ?

THE REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE (3:24—4:1)

The rewards of obedience are spoken of by Paul in 3:24, 25: "Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality." Here is a remarkable promise. In the first century, slaves owned nothing. They had no property they could call their own. Certainly they could not inherit anything. Yet Paul promises slaves the greatest inheritance any man could ever want.

What is Paul saying to these slaves (and to us)? "You may not be getting your due now. Your boss may underpay you and overwork you. But someday your Savior will balance the scales. The paycheck you get on Friday is not all your salary. Someday Jesus will give you the reward of the inheritance because it is really Him you are serving there on the job."

Some question exists about whom Paul was describing in verse 25. Who does the wrong? If Paul had in mind the master who is not treating his slaves right, he was saying that whatever inequities may exist where you work, do not let them control your behavior. You are to serve with a full heart, going all out for your employer. The Lord will see to it that in time you will be properly rewarded for giving the appropriate obedience.

On the other hand, if the slave is in mind, then Paul was saying to work to not do wrong on the job. That means no padding expense accounts, no taking of longer coffee breaks than management has established, no taking supplies home for personal use, and no blaming others for your mistakes. For each time you do wrong, you rob yourself of a part of the reward Jesus is saving up to give you one day as your inheritance for faithful service on the job.

Paul concluded with *a word to masters*. If you are directly responsible for people under your

oversight, such as a manager or a supervisor, Paul has this to say to you: "Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven" (4:1). Remember that in the first century masters had complete rights over their slaves, even the power of life and death. But Paul was informing his readers that a Christian master who has found new life in Jesus will treat his slaves with fairness; he will treat them in a way that is just and equitable.

If every employer in America were a genuine New Testament Christian, practicing his new life in Christ, we would not have to have unions, collective bargaining, and binding arbitration. Employers would just naturally treat their employees in such a way that it would be a joy to work for them.

Is this not simply a practical application of the Golden Rule? Jesus wants managers, supervisors, and CEO's to treat their employees as they would want to be treated if the roles were suddenly to be reversed. To expect your employees to do their best, you Christian employers must do your best for them. That is your *responsibility* to them.

Notice the *reason* Paul gives for managing the people under you in this way: "You, too, have a Master in heaven." In a word, accountability. To be effective as an employer, live out your new life on the job remembering you have the same Master in heaven as your employee does. You have to give Him an account one day of the way you ran your office or factory. If God will not show favoritism to employees who fail to do their best just because they are Christians, neither will He overlook your willful failure to govern your employees by the divine principles of what is right and just.

CONCLUSION

We do not preach a "social gospel," but we do preach a gospel with social implications. If you have been raised with Christ to new life, it cannot fail to make a difference in how you work. Christianity is not just for the pew. It is for the production line as well! If you let the Spirit's effect be seen in your life from 8:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday, those for whom you work will not have such a hard time accepting your testimony about Sunday!