



# Relationships Outside The Family

[3:22—4:6]

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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.*

*“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person” (3:22—4:6).*

Colossians 3:22—4:6 excited me at first because it dealt with slaves and masters. Since slavery has been outlawed in America, we do not have that problem. We twentieth-century Americans can be comfortable with this passage.

A new preacher in a rural congregation in Kentucky preached his first sermon against the evils of alcohol. Afterward, one man took him aside and told him that since Kentucky was

noted for its distilleries and several of the members worked in the local distillery, he would not be able to preach on that subject again. The next Sunday, the preacher preached on the evils of horse racing and the gambling connected with it. Again, one man took him aside and told him that since Kentucky was noted for its race horses and several of the members owned horses and liked to race them, he would not be able to preach on this subject again either. The preacher asked what he would recommend that he preach on. The man said, “Preach on those heathen witch doctors. There’s not one of them in a thousand miles.”

After taking a second look at this passage and remembering that the Bible is to be helpful, I became excited about this passage from a different viewpoint. The Bible provides you with guidelines for better Christian living and motivates you to live according to those guidelines. The Bible is always relevant.

How intensely practical this passage is! We have surrendered to Christ! Jesus is to be all and in all. He is to be Lord of the workday as well as the worship time, of our family as well as non-family relationships. Paul, in this passage, was showing that the Colossians’ allegiance to Christ affected the workplace, the home life, as well as their worship. They were told, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (3:17).

Another overriding thought is summed up and expressed in 4:5: "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity." Each Christian must always be aware of what others think. What kind of impression are we making for Christ? Will our actions lead others to Him? What about our speech? Is it what He would want? For a proper understanding of this text, we will notice first what is not stated.

First, Paul did not admonish the slaves to be loyal or obedient because the master treated them well. No doubt the slaves would have been more loyal and obedient if the master was kind and good. But what if their master was not? They still had the obligation to be loyal and obedient.

Second, no excuse regarding obedience was allowed the slave if the master mistreated them. The master could not be controlled. They were not accountable for the master! But they could control themselves! Whether the master was good or bad, they still had the responsibility to do their part, show respect, loyalty, and obedience.

Third, no blanket condemnation of the institution of slavery was given. Would this not have been a good time for Paul to have condemned such a corrupt practice as slavery? The best way to solve the problem was from the inside. The Christian slave was to be the best slave possible. The Christian was to serve the Lord where he was: "Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called" (1 Corinthians 7:20). The slaves were to be the best slaves they could be. They were not to seek freedom.

### **WHAT SERVANTS ARE TO DO (3:22-25)**

Paul wanted to give several instructions to the slaves. They were Christian slaves serving the Lord. As Christians, every area of their lives was affected. They were "new" men. They had different character traits than worldly people. They had to show Christ in their lives, even in their relationship with their master!

Since the master/slave relationship does not exist today in America, let us apply these instructions to the employer/employee relationship. First, employees are to carry out everything that they are asked to do (3:22). We are not free to pick and choose only those things which please us. While no one has the right to be asked to do what is contrary to God's way, we are to fulfill the

legitimate requests our employers have asked. We may not always agree with them! We may not always like what they ask! But we are to comply in all things if we continue working for them.

Second, employees are to do what is asked all the time (3:22), not just when the employer is watching us. We are not free to leave things undone simply because we disagree. When the employer is watching and when he is not, we are to serve loyally and faithfully.

Third, employees are to do what is asked from the heart (3:22), not grudgingly or with bitterness in our hearts. We are to be genuine!

Fourth, employees are to do what is asked with reverence for the Lord (3:22). Our relationship with our employer springs from our relationship with God. For the slave, obedience to an earthly master was considered as obedience to God. If he disobeyed an earthly master, he had disobeyed God. Our relationship with our boss reflects our Christianity. What kind of workman are you? Does the loyalty and quality of your work show Christ to others?

Fifth, employees are to realize they are to give themselves to the task (3:23). Wholehearted service! We are to serve with all our hearts. A reason for this is given: We are actually serving Christ. Our work, our job, is "as for the Lord."

Sixth, employees are working for the inheritance from the Lord (3:24). The Lord will reward us. Christian workers have a bonus that others do not have. We not only receive the paycheck and "perks" that go with the job, we also receive an inheritance from the Lord. The sobering thought is that the inheritance is tied to the manner and quality of our work or how we do our job! Those outside the body of Christ do not have that promise. "To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

Seventh, employees are representing Christ in the way they work (3:24). The quality of work that you perform, the manner in which you perform it, and the attitude toward the employer, all show your devotion to Christ. Paul, by inspiration, gave guidelines for how we are to do our jobs. To fail to live up to those guidelines indicates a failure to live by the guidelines Jesus gave. It represents a conscious choice on our part. Are you a devout follower of Jesus? Does our commitment to Jesus show in our job performance?

Eighth, employees are not immune to accountability (3:25). You will be repaid for the wrongs committed. We have forgotten this today. Our society operates on a different premise, one that chooses to ignore accountability for our actions.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds (Revelation 20:12).

The sobering thing about this passage is that our manner and quality of work coupled with our attitude will be part of the judgment.

Ninth, no favoritism toward employees will be shown (3:25). Ephesians 6:9 gives the same message to masters (or employers). Judgment will not be based on whether you were an employee or an employer, but whether you have done your job well. Christianity applies in the marketplace as well as in the church building!

#### **WHAT MASTERS ARE TO DO (4:1)**

Just as there are commands for the slaves, there are commands for the masters. The commands for the masters, however, are not so numerous. Perhaps this is true because more Christians were slaves than were masters.

Look at what Paul said with the employee/ employer relationship in mind. Paul said masters (or employers) needed to keep three truths in mind.

First, the employer should treat his employees fairly (4:1). Simply because a person has not fared as well in life as you have does not mean he should not be treated well. I recognize that some do not work as hard as it seems others do. The Christian will be fair and honest with all people.

Second, the employer will be governed by what is right (4:1). Do you live by the "do right" rule? All Christians should have at the center of their being the strong desire to do what is right. Should that be our commitment, we will be spared from mistreating others.

Third, the employer should realize he has a Master in heaven (4:1). No one is without accountability. No one is ever totally free in the

sense of responsibility and accountability. How you treat others will determine how you will be treated:

Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you (Matthew 7:1, 2).

Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).

Thus, the employer who deals harshly with his employees will receive no mercy from God.

#### **WHAT ALL ARE TO DO (4:2-6)**

Paul gives three suggestions for godly living. First, devote yourself to prayer (4:2). Pray regularly, "without ceasing." Paul asked the Colossians to pray for him, that he might have the opportunity to preach and that he might preach the gospel plainly. Paul was in prison for preaching. Yet his great desire was for the church to pray that he might have the opportunity to preach again.

Second, act wisely toward outsiders (4:5). Opportunities are so precious! Make the best use of them! What do others think of you? What kind of influence are you for Christ?

Third, watch your speech. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person" (4:6). Your speech is to be "with grace." It is to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. Say something nice about others whether they deserve it or not. You did not deserve God's saving grace. Your speech is to be "seasoned with salt." It is to have a saving influence. Does your speech cause others to thirst for God and His Word? You are to "know how you should respond to each person." Study to know the difference! As you work with people, you are influencing them for Christ! What works with one person will not necessarily work with another!

#### **CONCLUSION**

How important this passage is! Work as if you are working for the Lord. Pray continuously. Act wisely toward outsiders. Watch your language. Whatever the relationship, is Christ seen in you?