

Colossians 3:22-4:1

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[0 : 00] All right, thank you, Wes. Please take out your copy of God's Word. Turn to Paul's letter to the Colossians. Chapter 3. Our text for today is Colossians 3, verse 22 through chapter 4, verse 1.

Before we read it together, I'm going to say to you that my comments this morning concerning this text will be brief, at least brief-ish. If you're a guest with us, this is not the norm. The Word of God is incredibly rich.

Even if we break down each sermon as we move verse by verse, even down to just a single sermon, there's so much to be said. There's so much layer in God's Word. And so, it's normally not the way that we handle things.

I go 45 to an hour. Hopefully 45. The Word of God requires great care, both in its exegesis and in its application.

And this morning's text is not an exception to that rule. I'm not suggesting that we're saying, eh, it doesn't really matter. But I'm going to be brief this morning for two reasons. The reason of less importance is that we have a number of matters to handle at the end of our service.

[1 : 17] And at some point, we have to wrap this up together. And so, for the sake of time in that regard, I'm going to try to keep my comments brief. And the second, which is of greater importance, I think of primary importance, is that Paul's exhortations in these verses are simple.

And simple commands should be understood and obeyed simply. This week, I just found that I didn't really need to make it too terribly complex. That there was no real need to parse verbs for you and help you get some other depth of knowledge that really isn't in the text.

There's a couple of simple exhortations for us. Last week, we looked at four exhortations for the household of the new self.

To remind you where we've been in chapter 3 and to catch some of you up who haven't been here with us this summer, chapter 3, verse 1 reads, If then you have been raised with Christ, so if you are in Christ, if you are a Christian, your heart's been made new because of the regenerating work of the power of the Spirit in your life, then we are to seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated.

Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We're to set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[2 : 43] So, we now have this reorientation because our old self is dead, and we have a new self. And Paul expounds upon this, verse 5, that we should put to death, therefore, what is earthly in us.

And then picking up in verse 10, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed. Verse 12, Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. And he begins to list these proper activities of the Christian life, as well as telling us the things that we ought not be doing.

And I've stressed to you that he's not giving us exhaustive lists, but he's primarily talking about sins of misplaced love or misplaced hate.

And then he's giving us the positive, how it is we should live together in community. He's specifically speaking to the church. But last week, we saw a bit of a shift, a little bit of a narrowing of his scope. While he's talking about the Christian church at large, the church here in Function Together at Colossae, he goes a little narrower to talk about the Christian household. So, we saw these exhortations to wives, to husbands, to children, and to parents last week.

[3 : 58] And this week really is a continuation of these exhortations, of exhortation for the Christian household. The application of which is really rather simple for us.

And we'll get into that. But let's read the text together. Colossians 3, 22 through 4, 1. Paul writes, And beloved, this is God's word to us.

It's written for His glory and for our good. We would all do well to listen to it this morning in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Now, as we look at the text this morning, I've broken it down into four points for us.

The first one is, the aim of Paul's exhortation here is not social or political commentary. This is not the point of what he's trying to accomplish as he's speaking to the church at Colossae.

It's not social or political commentary. He's not in this text seeking to destroy the institution of slavery. Now, he's already commented on new spiritual realities for those who are in Christ.

[5 : 47] Look back up in chapter 3 to verse 11, where he writes, So he says, All these dividing barriers, which were strong barriers in this day, probably much stronger than anything we experience today in our particular social context, that all of these things are torn down for those who Christ is all.

He is the great equalizer in the Christian church. So he's already, in some sense, in the spiritual sense, he's put away the idea of slave and free.

That a free man and a slave could come together and have unity in Christ has already been stated in Colossians 3.11. The gospel certainly has social and political implications.

It has come into this world and it is making the world new, bringing about redemption for a broken place. But it does not change those realities in a moment.

Isn't that where we find ourselves living between kind of these two worlds where Christ has ushered in the kingdom of God, but yet it's yet to fully arrive. He's returned to heaven.

[7 : 20] He's seated at the right hand of the Father. And we're eagerly awaiting His return to establish forever His reign here on earth. It's coming to pass.

But, all the same, we ought to be, as Christians, working to change our society. We ought to want to see things improve.

And the gospel certainly has the power to do so and has had throughout history. I should give you a couple examples. Some names that may be familiar to you, some that may not.

And the way in which these people were not only preachers of the gospel, missionaries, but worked in social context to bring about change. John Wesley and Elizabeth Fry worked very hard in their lives for prison reform, saw some success in that.

I hope most of you are familiar with William Wilberforce, who labored in his life and finally saw the abolition of British slavery. Theodore Fleidner built German hospitals.

[8 : 25] George Mueller cared for thousands of orphans. William Carey worked to abolish and found success in abolishing widow burning and child sacrifice in India.

David Livingston and many others in Africa discouraged polygamy, fought the slave trade, built schools, and built hospitals. Christianity is good for the world.

Because God's ways are far more excellent than man's ways. Man is completely corrupt by sin apart from Christ.

And at his greatest effort, fouls everything up. Christianity comes into those social and political contexts and brings about good and right and proper change.

But that's not what Paul's trying to do here. Understand that the slavery of Paul's day, for the most part, was much different than the historical slavery that we are all aware of.

[9 : 30] The slavery that happened here in our own country. You need to understand that in this day, in the Greco-Roman world, more than 50% of the population was a slave population.

It was not typically ethnically driven, although there were times that people would go and conquer another people and make them slaves. But more often than not, it was economically driven.

Many of the people that were slaves in this day volunteered themselves as slaves because they could not afford to live. They did not have the means necessary, and so they hired themselves out, essentially, put themselves on the market, and they were bought in this way.

Not always the case. But generally speaking, it was a bit of a different environment. But also, he is not endorsing slavery in this text. The Bible certainly does not endorse slavery, particularly in the way that we think about and understand slavery.

Just to give you a couple of examples, Exodus 21.16 says, Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

[10 : 41] And in 1 Timothy 1.10, And enslavers are mentioned in a list of men counted as lawless and disobedient. But this is not ultimately what Paul is trying to do.

The second point, Paul's aim, is to instruct the Christian in whatever situation he or she may find themselves in to live in a way that honors the Lord.

Verse 22, Bond servants or servants, slaves, 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. Obey in everything. Just as we saw was the case with wives and children in the preceding verses, the will of the one placed over you should be obeyed, provided that your obedience does not break the command of God.

Note the phrase, those who are your earthly masters. Husbands, husbands, parents, and masters in this context, bosses in ours, are instruments of God and He ultimately rules over them.

[11 : 54] Chapter 4, verse 1. Masters, treat your bond servants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven. And so if your earthly master, if your parents, if your husband, if you're a wife, asks you, commands you to do something outside the law of God, you have God's permission to circumnavigate in that case.

Otherwise, you are to obey in everything. Not simply to please on the outward appearance. It says, not just by way of eye service as a people-pleaser.

Not just going through the motions, right? Making it look good, but with the sincerity of your heart because you fear the Lord. With a proper and right understanding and perspective on God, your ultimate master, the one whom you ultimately serve, doing things from the heart with sincerity.

And Paul gives two proper motivations for this. One in the positive and one in the negative. The positive is found in verse 24. Knowing that from the Lord, you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. Again, as I just said, because ultimately you are serving Christ. And if you are serving Christ, if you have this proper and right understanding, if you are a servant and in everything obey your earthly master, you're doing it because you're a Christian.

[13 : 27] Because you're found in Him. Don't divorce this from the rest of the chapter. Remember what we started talking about at the beginning of chapter 3. He's still talking about these things as Christian people that we should put off and those things that we should be putting on.

So as a Christian person, you will live in this way. This is the positive because there's a promise. You'll receive the inheritance as your reward.

And it's tempting at this point as we look at verse 25 and then the negative motivation in, excuse me, in verse 24 and the negative motivation in verse 25 to kind of spin off, maybe try to sort out kind of what heaven's going to look like and how we'll be rewarded or how we may be punished if we're found in Christ.

I don't think Paul means it to be nearly that complex. He simply says, the inheritance. And in the Greek, the article is there. The is actually in the original text.

And so what I think he's talking about is that our proper and right orientation as servants or employees in our case should be because we are Christians as a response to what God has done on our behalf, we should serve the Lord knowing full well that we don't live for this world, but we live for eternity.

[14 : 43] The inheritance of eternal life with Him. He is our master. He is our King. We'll serve Him now and forevermore.

Let me give you a cross reference for this. Romans 2, verses 6-8. Paul writes there, He will render to each one according to His works.

To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath.

And fury. Because of who we are, the right and proper good response as Christian people, we will obey. Take your bulletin.

There's a quote which I didn't plan to use, but it's just fitting. If I spurge it on the front of it, which says, those whom free grace chooses, free grace cleanses, we are not chosen because we are holy, but chosen to be holy.

[15 : 46] And being chosen, the purpose is no dead letter, but we are made to seek after holiness. So by the same grace that saves us, this grace perfects us.

And therefore, we work as we are serving the Lord Christ. The second motivation found in verse 25 stated in the negative, for the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is

no partiality.

Here I believe that Paul is referring to immediate punishment, immediate wrongdoing. If you choose this other path, if you're going to not serve your master as you should, there will be consequences for this.

Galatians 6-7 says, Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that will he also reap. It will go well with you if you walk in the ways of God.

And it will not if you do not. So that was the second point. Thirdly, Paul does not neglect God's desire for justice.

[16:57] Chapter 4, verse 1. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven. Now I'm sure you've already noted, seen the interesting chapter break here.

Isn't it strange when a sermon is preached that crosses over a chapter break? It doesn't happen very often. Typically, chapters and verses are divided up very neatly and appropriately.

This is an interesting one. But let me remind you, if you don't already know, that chapters and verses are not inspired. The original Greek text did not have chapter and verse.

In fact, had no punctuation either. They're not inspired. The ones we have before us today are largely taken from the Geneva Bible. And there's a history behind that as well.

Other sourcing and historical roots for how the Geneva arrived at the way that it did. This one is a bit of a mystery. And I didn't take a ton of time this week. I just didn't think it was of great value for my week and the effort of it to figure out why exactly, possibly, this had happened.

[18:04] But I did find an interesting quote. Another Spurgeon quote, of course, and he wrote of this text, I sometimes think that the good men who chop the Bible up into chapters must have hoped that we should not read this message to the masters as he had put it in another chapter.

But I never like to read about the servants without also reading about the masters. There are six for one and half a dozen for the other and as is usual in the scriptures there are balanced duties.

If there is an exhortation to the children there is generally one to the parents close by. And if there is a word to wives there is one for husbands too. And so he postulates that it's possible that the people who chopped this up just didn't want us to see it together.

We don't know. But certainly we need to take it together. Both the implications for both sides of this relationship. So addressed here Paul says in this social system that exists masters treat your slaves or your bond servants justly and fairly.

Deal with them appropriately as the God of heaven because we also have a master in heaven has treated you. There's a great deal of theme in the scriptures concerning justice.

[19:27] Let me give you two Old Testament examples. Micah 6.8 says Proverbs 21.3 To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

And so this is required in this relationship that Paul is writing to that masters would treat their slaves justly and fairly. And this is the way in which the new self affects the Christian household.

Likely cared for in this way. Wives and children with servants in the home doing a work there. The servants should obey in everything with a sincerity of heart looking to please God ultimately and the masters should treat them justly and fairly recognizing that they have a master in heaven.

I don't think any of us in this room have servants in our home. Maybe some of you can pay somebody to come over and cut your grass or clean up after you but more than likely we don't.

And so we need to ask the question what is the application for our context? In verse 23 I think to bring us back to and pull that I didn't skip it it's here in our preaching.

[20:50] Whatever you do children you should know this one we've been memorizing it work heartily as for the Lord and not for men. That's found within this exhortation to the slave.

I'm not ignoring that but he says whatever you do whatever you're asked to do work heartily as for the Lord and not for men. And I think rightly we can take the principles found here and we can draw them into our modern day to speak of any situation that we find ourselves in where there is an authority figure placed over us.

Namely for our church your job and schooling your classroom as well that you recognize while we do so voluntarily you don't have to work at your job you don't have to be a student at the University of North Georgia or at one of the other schools in our area you can sign up for a class and you can drop the class you can say I really don't like the professor already in this first week I can tell I'm not going to enjoy this class and you can get out of the class we voluntarily submit ourselves to the

authority but once we are submitted to that authority while we are under their guidance we should do this in the same way heartily we should throw our very being into the work that we're doing because we're not ultimately working for them ultimately we're working for God God has put us in this world to work and to keep to produce and we ought to do that well beloved Christians should be the very very best of students and the very very best of employees not that we're necessarily the smartest or the most talented but we ought to be the hardest workers we should be the ones that are showing up early and leaving late we should be the ones that work through the lunch break we should be the ones that leverage all that we have for the sake of our employer or for the sake of your professor people should be impressed by the way in which we work a great deal of devotion on our part because we're not doing it for them we're doing it for God

God has placed tasks ahead of us and we ought to do them heartily throw your energy into the things that you have going on and if you can't rightly work for a boss or for being a class and being underneath a professor then stop but until you do be obedient to the thing that God has asked of you a note in our employment especially for you young people who are looking toward that so many of us enslave ourselves to our employers by the lifestyle that we choose to live we get ourselves in a living situation where we couldn't possibly lose the job or quit the job because we're so financially strapped we're so tight we're living right up to our limit paycheck to paycheck is often the phrase being used that if you were to come out from underneath the authority of that individual you couldn't possibly survive

Proverbs 22:7 says the rich rules over the poor and the borrower is the slave of the lender so this is an aside to that be careful how you spend your money and who you get involved with because once you are God says be obedient in everything provided that you don't break the commandment of God now in closing I want you guys to turn to Romans chapter 6 with me if you're a regular with us you are shocked that I just said in closing we've got a little ways to go I want to pause it to you I want you to stop and think about this phrase that I'm about saying that I'm going to give you some biblical proof of it but that is that we are all every one of us right in Christ not in Christ all of humanity all of us are slaves to something we are all slaves to something you are a slave to whatever it is that you worship and I want to show you that in

[25 : 08] Romans chapter 6 beginning in verse 15 we're picking up in the middle of his argument so you see that you may be a little confused but we're picking up at verse 15 what then are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace by no means do you not know that if you present yourselves!

to anyone as obedient slaves you are slaves to the one whom you obey so you get the logic there right if you are a slave if you present yourself to a slave someone you're a slave of them that's exactly what he's saying you are obligated to obey that authority then he goes on to say in the last part of 16 either of sin which leads to death or of obedience which leads to righteousness but thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness so having been set free from being a slave of sin you've just transitioned now old self you've transitioned new self to being a slave of righteousness verse 19 Paul says I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations he's saying

I'm using an analogy that you will understand for just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification for when you were slaves of sin you were free in regard to righteousness you didn't have to be righteous is what he's saying when you were a slave to sin but what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you were now ashamed for the end of those things is death but now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end eternal life for the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord now he comes at it in Romans 6 from the opposite side he's saying here is the just and due consequence for the way in which you live your life this is the way he's tracking our logic through you can flip the entire thing over to say that if we are slaves of sin our end is destruction right a certain way we're not going to be able to put off the old self because we still are the old self but if you are in

Christ you've changed positionally no longer a slave of sin but now a slave of something else he actually gives us three things kind of in progression here in verse 16 slaves of obedience verses 18 and 19 of righteousness and verse 22 of God that we will in fact live underneath our master this is

the great proof of who we are we are all slaves to something and you have to ask yourself that question this morning this is a good and right thing to ask yourself on a continual basis what am I a slave of what do I ultimately worship how does my life reflect who I am I hope with a great deal of longing that everyone who can hear me this morning can say with confidence I am a slave of Christ I'm a slave of God I'm a slave of righteousness I'm a slave of obedience I find at work within me the spirit of God moving me in that way not perfect not made perfect! [29 : 13] I'm certainly not but I'm being moved in that direction I recognize that I no longer have to sin I don't love sin the way I used to love sin I love righteousness I find that things go well with me I find that my eyes are listed towards heaven as I live in the ways of God it's the great desire of my life to honor him with all that I do!

There should be the! your heart if you are you have gone through some kind of rote process that somebody has presented to you you have raised a hand you have walked an aisle you have repeated a prayer and there has never been a change in your life God has never entered into you and regenerated you made you new you are still old self you haven't been changed positionally this is a possibility!

for you the other is that you are just so cold and callous to the gospel that God has changed your heart but you have just walked away from the glorious truth of it maybe for some of you your sin wasn't so great in your mind you were generally a good person I can't tell you how many testimonies I've heard that opened up I wasn't really a bad person you know partying and smoking and drinking and we'll list off a couple of other kind of nominal sins or not at all sins even in some cases you were a wretched horrible enemy of God everything you did no matter how minor in your mind screamed at him I hate you but he loved you and he sent Christ to bear the wrath of all that sin that you've committed up to this day!

all commit you were his enemy and he made you his friend you have to have your heart warmed back up by the truth of the gospel many of you may not ever spend any time in the scripture and this is the tool that the spirit uses to bring about change in us this is the great thing that reminds us again and again and again of God's great love for us in Christ keeps me warm because I grow cold I drift away from this I get away from reading the scripture and being engaged in it and meditating on it and suddenly I forget the gospel I know what up here but my heart fails to believe it and my life begins to look more like my old self and less like my new self I forget who I am in Christ I long for everyone here to be able to say with Paul as he said in Galatians 2 20 I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer

I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me my old self has died and now this life that I still live I live in Christ and this is why Paul repeatedly calls himself a slave of Christ in salutations Romans 1 1 Philippians 1 1 Titus 1 1 to name a few says that he is a bond servant of Jesus Christ you were bought with the price grace is not cheap you don't respond to some invitation and then live however you want to live you must live in response to the gospel if you are in Christ your life will look different and it is a great fear as I say these things to you to cast doubt where doubt doesn't need to be but it is a greater fear that you would come here especially you young people across your college career and get false assurance after false assurance after false assurance because the end is too great it's too costly a thing your end is destruction death and eternal separation from [33 : 27] God if you don't wrestle with this idea in your time here if you don't actually wrap your mind around Jesus cannot just be your savior he has to be your savior and your Lord if he changes who you are you of Christ and your life must reflect this let's pray together