

Colossians 3:22-4:1

December 10, 2023



MAIN POINT

The key to healthy relationships is focusing on Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What do you do for a living? Where do you work, and how would you describe your work environment? Or if you aren't currently employed, describe any jobs you have had in the past.

What motivates you to be successful at work? Explain.

"What do you do?" is a common feature of small talk. When we write bios on social media or introduce ourselves to someone, we often say our names and our professions. We spend most of our waking hours at work or working, so the work we do starts to define who we are. In American culture, who we are is closely linked to what we do for a living. If we aren't careful, work becomes our primary pursuit in life, but Jesus wants something better for us. In fact, if you pursue anything other than Jesus, you are pursuing something that is unable to sustain you. Our relationship to work is secondary to our relationship with Jesus Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ COLOSSIANS 3:22 and 4:1.

Verse 22 starts with the word "slaves." What type of relationship was Paul describing in these verses?

How is this different than what we typically think of when we hear the word slavery?

Slavery in Paul's world was not slavery as we think about it. The word Paul used means bondservant, which is a type of indentured servitude that was not permanent, wasn't



based on race, and gave various rights to the enslaved. The master would be responsible for providing the servant with food and shelter. Bond slavery was a labor agreement between two parties. What Paul had in mind here was a work relationship, like the ones we have with our own employers.

Regardless of whether we are employees or employers, how do we ultimately model Jesus in our work?

Read John 1:14. What two traits did Jesus model perfectly according to the end of this verse? Which side do you err toward more naturally? Why is it important to demonstrate both?

Think back to the interactions Jesus had with people in the Gospels. Where are some places He showed grace and truth?

What is the difference in pursuing better moral choices and pursuing the character of Jesus?

Believers work with the character of Christ. When we interact with people, it is important to remember that Jesus lived among us and modeled perfectly how to interact with others. Jesus was full of grace and truth. Each of us has a natural bent in one of these directions, but Jesus modeled both perfectly. As followers of Christ, we should seek to be more conformed to the image of Jesus every day, and that means exhibiting grace and truth the way Jesus did. We do not work for the approval of men but to demonstrate the character of Christ.

What are a few ways you can show grace and truth in your work relationships?

 **ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ COLOSSIANS 3:23-25.**

How does ultimately working for Jesus change everything about our work?

Regardless of our jobs, how do we serve the Lord with our work (v. 24)?

How do we miss the point of working for Christ when we try and find our fulfillment and approval in people and their expectations of us?

We do not work for the approval of men but for the approval of Jesus. Whatever we do, we do for the Lord (v. 23). We have earthly masters, but our ultimate approval is found in the finished work of Christ. If you are working for the approval of someone or something other than Christ, you will be crushed by the weight of expectations because no one other than Jesus can sustain your need for approval. His approval is the one we need, and it is His approval we find at the foot of the cross.

What does it mean to not work for approval, but to work in approval?



How can we work in the approval of Christ without thinking we are earning favor with God by our work?

The approval of our bosses is secondary to the approval we have found in Christ. By grace, through faith, in Christ, we have approval before the Father. There is nothing left for us to earn. Jesus has done everything necessary. We are not who our boss says we are. Most powerfully and most significantly, we are who Jesus says we are. When we work in the approval of Christ, we do so from a glad and generous heart that has been changed by the gospel and reflect that changed heart in the work we do for our earthly masters. Jesus has done all the work that truly matters for us.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Are you more likely to focus on your relationship with Christ or your relationships with other people?

How can you make your relationship with Jesus the primary pursuit of your life?

What can you do to daily set your mind on Christ at work?

When have you sought the approval of another person or a goal instead of Jesus? What did you learn from that experience?

PRAYER

Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.

Pray that you would see your relationship with Christ as the most important relationship in your life. Ask the Spirit to help you set your mind on the things that are above where Jesus is. Praise God for giving you all the approval you need in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage:

December 17, 2023 --- Colossians 4:2-6



COMMENTARY

3:22-25. The section on servants and masters is somewhat expanded in comparison to the “family” section. This may be due to the unique situation in the church at Colossae, where the runaway slave, Onesimus, was returning to his master, Philemon (Col. 4:9; Philemon). The category of slave-master would be equivalent to our modern employee-employers. The arena is the workplace. Slaves are to obey their earthly masters. Paul reminds those under authority that they have a master in heaven who observes their internal attitude and external performance (vv. 24–25). Christian employees are to render sincere service. The employee is not to work only when the boss is looking. The employee is to recognize that in the final analysis he is working for the Lord, not for men and so he should do his best. Such work will be rewarded. Remember, God does not play favorites. He “rewards” wrong motives and work as well as good.

4:1. All Scripture is God breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). Chapter divisions are another story. The separation of Colossians 4:1 from the preceding context is obviously one case where the line was drawn too early. The admonition to masters clearly belongs with the section dealing with relationships. Masters (those in authority), like husbands and fathers, are not to abuse their authority. They are to treat their workers fairly with justice. Why? They, too, have a Master in heaven. Paul began chapter 3 by urging believers to “look above.” He has closed the chapter in the same way. Wives are to “look above” to Christ as their example of submission; husbands are to “look above” to Christ as their example of love; children are to “look above” to Christ as their example of obedience; slaves are to “look above” to Christ as their impartial rewarder; masters are to “look above” to Christ as their heavenly judge. Spirituality is a matter of understanding our identification with Christ, having our lifestyle transformed, and honoring Christ in our relationships. Ordinary sounding stuff, but with Christ at the center, it becomes extraordinary indeed.

