

Faith at Work: Serving Christ through Our Work

Last week we began a five-week sermon series on work. As Steve explained, work is the main thing you do each week, whether you get paid to do it or not. Last week we saw that work was part of God's original design. It wasn't just something that came about as a result of the fall. We are made to work! And since this is true, how we work and how we think about work matters a lot. And so in this study as we continue to consider this topic of work, we will look at how we can serve Christ through our work through Paul's instructions to slaves and to masters in Colossians. Obviously, our work context is very different than that of slaves in the Roman world, nevertheless, there are still principles taught there that are very relevant to us.*

Opening Question: In last week's sermon, Steve gave us the assignment of formulating a description of our work (the main thing you do) in terms of its value. What did you come up with?

Steve said:

Many Christians (and many churches) have a two-tiered approach to work. The top tier would be pastors, missionaries, campus ministers, etc. The bottom tier would be everybody else - the people who make money to support those in the top tier who do the important, spiritual stuff. If there's any real value in the work of the bottom tier, it lies in opportunities their work gives them to share Christ with others.

1. What is your reaction to this "two-tiered approach to work"?

Read Colossians 3:22-4:1

2. How does Paul instruct slaves to do their work in verse 22? What attitudes and actions did he encourage?
3. Apply these instructions to your own work context. What might it mean for you to avoid merely "external service" in your work? What does it mean to do your work with "sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord?"
4. In verse 23, Paul says that slaves are to do their work "heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." What does this mean?

5. What would it look like for you to do your work as an expression of devotion to Jesus (i.e. “as for the Lord”)?

Steve said:

If I had to summarize what it looks like to “do your work heartily unto the Lord,” I would say two things. First, ***you do your work well***. If you’re a carpenter, you make good tables. If you’re a tax accountant, you know the tax code and you skillfully prepare people’s taxes. If you’re a teacher, you know the material and communicate it in ways that help your students learn. First and foremost you do your work well. Second, to serve the Lord Christ in your work, ***you do your work “Christianly.”*** That’s what the rest of Colossians 3 has been talking about. In verse 8, for example, Paul tells us to put aside “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.” If you bring anger and “abusive speech” into the workplace you won’t be able to “serve the Lord Christ” through your work. In verse 12 Paul says to “put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” If you wear those virtues to work, you will be Christlike in the way you do your work. You don’t have to be a follower of Christ to make good tables; but you do need to be a follower of Christ to make good tables Christianly. Our lives are supposed to be a seamless whole in which there is continuity between our home life, our church life, and our work life.

6. As you think about doing your work “*Christianly*” how do you think you are doing? Where do you need to grow?
7. What is the main takeaway for you from this study? Where do you need to grow and change to more consistently live out this Christ-centered perspective in your work?

*** Note from Steve’s sermon about slavery as it relates to work in our day:** It’s important to acknowledge that our work context here in the United States is very different than the context of slaves in the Roman Empire. Paul didn’t directly challenge the institution of slavery. He did urge slaves to become free if possible (1 Corinthians 7:21); if freedom was not possible, he urged slaves to remain in that condition and do their work heartily, as unto the Lord. Our work context is very different, isn’t it? We have the freedom change jobs and even careers. We can get training and education that give us many different options. And in our places of work, in theory at least, we have laws that protect us from being mistreated. Workers who are mistreated can make appeals to HR departments and/or governmental agencies. I know that there are abuses, but we have many advantages in our work that slaves in the first century didn’t have. Nevertheless, the overarching perspectives Paul gives in Colossians 3 are supremely relevant to us.