

Faith @Work (Part 2)
Colossians 3:22-4:1

This morning we're wrapping up a two-week series on "work." Your work is the main thing you do each week whether you get paid for it or not. Your work is the main contribution you make each week.

In every type of work there's some version of a performance review. Sometimes it's formal and structured, and sometimes it's informal.

- * In some situations you have an employer or a board or a supervisor who evaluates your work; your income and your advancement depend on your performance review.
- * In other situations, those impacted by your work evaluate you; your clients or customers evaluate your work and decide if they want to continue to coming to your for whatever service you provide or whether they want to go to someone else.
- * In other situations, your performance review takes place years later. Your children or your parishioners or your students look back and reflect on how you did your work as a parent or a pastor or a teacher.

All of those performance reviews are important. It matters what people think about the work we do. If people don't respect who we are and the work we do, we won't have the opportunity to serve and influence them. That's a huge part of our calling, right?

Today we are going to see from Colossians 3 that there is another "performance review" for our work that we should also care about. Paul actually says that in our work we are "serving the Lord Christ" and that his evaluation of our work is what matters most. As we discussed last week, Paul didn't have a two-tiered view of the body of Christ where a few elite believers "serve the Lord" through their work (e.g., pastors, missionaries) and everybody else works because they have to. As we'll see today, Paul's conviction was that **every believer should serve the Lord as they work**. This means that no matter what type of work you do, you can receive his "well done" at the end of each day. Jesus told parables that stress that God isn't a harsh task master who's waiting to catch his servants making a mistake; rather, God is a generous master who supplies everything we need to serve him and who loves to catch us in the act of doing what pleases him.

I hope that you leave here today convinced not only that you **should** serve the Lord through your work, but also that you **can** do so with his help.

The context of Colossians 3:22-4:1 is very significant and should inform the way we hear Paul's teaching on work. Paul is addressing "bondservants" (or slaves) and masters who lived in the Roman Empire in the first century. Generally speaking, slavery in the first century wasn't as oppressive and brutal as slavery was in this country. But it was slavery nonetheless; bondservants were at the mercy of their earthy masters. Paul did not endorse or condone slavery; in another passage Paul urged slaves to secure their freedom when possible (1 Corinthians 7:21). But as long as someone was a bondservant, he urged them to see even **their work** as an opportunity to **serve Christ**. [The broader teaching of the New Testament laid the foundation for the abolition of slavery in places like England and the United States many centuries later.]

Keep the context of this passage in mind as you think about your own work. If you have something close to your “dream job” (you love what you do even if it’s demanding at times), realize that the vast majority of people who have ever lived have had a more difficult work situation than you have. Let that realization humble you to the core and make you teachable this morning. Those to whom much is given, much is required.

You may be on the other end of the spectrum; for you work may be “a four-letter word.” You may dread doing your work; you may be under-appreciated and under-compensated; you may long for a day when you can do something different. Your work situation is closer to that of the people Paul addresses in this passage. The bondservants who had come to Christ were stuck doing work they hadn’t chosen; and there was usually no way out. And yet Paul urged them to serve Christ through their work. Even **their** work could be an expression of devotion to Christ - something precious and valuable to Christ himself. The same can be true of your work.

Let’s dive into the passage. In Colossians 3:22-4:1, Paul tells us:

Serve Christ through your work. (*Colossians 3:22-4:1*) Notice the motivation and the focus Paul urges upon us in verse 22.

22 Bondservants, 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.

Paul is telling them, “Don’t just work hard and when your master is looking” (that’s what he means by “eye-service”). And he is telling the, “Don’t merely seek the approval of other people” (don’t be “people pleasers”). They shouldn’t merely fear their earthly master; they should fear the Lord. If they care more about what the Lord wants from them, they will do their work well all the time because the Lord is always watching.

Paul restates this idea in verses 23 and 24:

23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Paul says, “Whatever you do. . .” - whether you love it or hate it - “work heartily.” Because they were followers of Christ, they were to do their work **heartily**, from the heart (or soul). Instead of going through the motions, they were supposed to put their heart into their work.

And they were to do their work “. . .as for the Lord, rather than for men.” Their work was to be an expression of their devotion to Jesus. In our context, this means that when we work, we are to say to Jesus, “I’m not merely doing this work because I’m getting paid for it. I’m not merely doing this work because people are watching. **I am doing this for you.** I am roofing this house for you. . . preaching this sermon for you. . .teaching these children for you. . .preparing these taxes for you.”

There *is* a sense in which we do our work **for other people** - for whoever writes our paycheck, for the people who benefit from our work. But here Paul is saying that our ultimate audience is the Lord Jesus Christ; we do our work as an act of devotion, even worship, to Him. ***It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.***

In verse 25 Paul mentions the flip side of rewards, namely the consequences of the wrong we have done (even in the context of work):

25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

The biblical authors are very consistent in saying that there are consequences for disobedience. Here Paul is saying that the believer who is careless or unfaithful in their work will “receive the consequences of that wrong.” There are consequences in this life and rewards lost in the next.

In the next verse, Paul addresses earthly masters. Colossians 4:1 reads:

1 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Christian masters needed to understand the same spiritual reality as their servants: they too have a Master/Lord in heaven. They should do **their** work mindful of the fact that they too have to answer to Someone. Since they want **their** Master/Lord to show them “justice and fairness,” they need to grant “justice and fairness” to their bondservants.

The overarching principle is that if you have authority over others in **your** workplace (if people answer to you), know that you too have to answer to your Lord in heaven. Hopefully the policies and practices of your workplace include “justice and fairness” when it comes to the way people are compensated, the way grievances are addressed, and in many other ways. But beyond that, as followers of Christ we are to exude justice and fairness in all our dealings in the workplace. It’s not enough to follow official guidelines. We also need to ask, “Is my master in heaven pleased with the way I think about, speak with, and treat those under my authority?” We are to treat others the way God in Christ has treated us, even when we’re making tough decisions or bringing a word of correction.

As followers of Christ, we are called to **Serve Christ through our work**. Basically that means doing our work the way Christ would if he were doing our work. As the body of Christ, that’s what we strive to do: we do the very things Jesus would do if he were living our lives, including what we do during the best hours of our week (i.e., when we work).

This week (again) I asked a couple people here at Faith to give me their reflections on their work, specifically how they “serve Christ through their work.” I think that their reflections will stimulate your thinking about serving Christ in **your** work.

The first person is an elementary school teacher; she works with small groups of kids who are struggling academically (reading and math). Often these kids also struggle emotionally and socially. These days the emotional need are at the forefront. In terms of “serving Christ through her work,” she writes this:

- * “My relationship with Christ affects every area of my life and interaction I have with others, whether at school, the grocery store or at church. When my focus is on Christ, I bring the fruits of the spirit with me. When I strive to embody Scripture, it is easier to provide encouragement, joy, and empathy to staff and others.”

She understands that she bring herself to her work; so she seeks to embody the fruit of the Spirit.

- * “By focusing daily on Christ and his teachings my attitude and emotions are different from that of many people. This has given me the opportunity to share that I am a believer and want to share the joy Christ gives me. I pray daily for our students, staff, and school community.”

Because she does what we talked about last week - she pays attention to herself and to her work - people notice a difference in her life. And she prays daily for the people in her workplace; only God knows the impact of our praying. As a result she has opportunities to talk about her faith.

My observation is that when people respect who you and the work you do, they are often open to hearing about your relationship with Jesus. The opposite is true if people don't respect who you are (how you speak and how you treat people) and don't respect the work you do. If they don't like what they **can see** about us, why would they be interested in what they **can't see** (our faith, our relationship with Christ)?

The second person who shared about their work is an RA (Resident Assistant) in a dorm at K-State. He said that he's not merely a “hall monitor” (breaking up parties and enforcing the rules).

- * He writes, “Above all I am the frontline person if [residents] have a problem, everything from where a building is located on campus to the resident crying due to life, mental health issues, stress of school, you name it. . . . an RA is expected to be there for residents, to help, educate, and empathize with them as they go through the year. A good RA is a good friend, one who loves you even through the times where it is tough.”

Listen to how he seeks to serve Christ through his work:

- * “My relationship with Christ completely encompasses my work as an RA, this position is all about interacting with people, residents, co-workers, supervisors, etc. There are days when I don't want to talk with residents, or I have schoolwork I need to do, there's times when I could easily ignore residents, focus on myself, maybe turn a blind eye to someone breaking the rules because I feel tired, but that is not what I am called to do. Mark 10:45 says "For even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve" and if Jesus prioritized others with a sacrificial love then I am to do so as well.”

So he seeks to imitate Christ by serving people as Christ did. Here's how he thinks about the influence he can have for Christ:

- * "Being an RA puts me in a good spot to influence others. . . . [sometimes people have] come to me simply because I was the RA, and they didn't know where else to go. These opportunities are great for sharing the gospel or giving advice. I hear a lot about their lives, and I give them advice on classes, dating, and many other weird topics."

Listen to what he says next:

- * "Above all though my time as an RA has deepened my prayer life, often spiritual conversations don't go very far, or get shut out by other conversation topics. However, I see students in tough spots, stress from classes, issues with relationships, brokenness as they seek fulfillment where it won't be found. I have found that, especially this year, it has driven me to my knees in prayer. I have spent more time praying that residents would succeed at, chem tests, calc test, etc. than I have ever praying for a test I had. Living with these people allows me to see their hurts, pains, and struggles. Often these are the topics of my prayers, the best way I can serve my residents is to take their problems to someone who can help. K-State has a lot of resources for just about everything - tutoring, mental health, sexual assault victims, and many more. But none of those resource can help as Christ does. So I take their problems to the one who can handle every problem."

As with the teacher in the first example, he prays for the people he serves. Praying is one of the most sacrificial things you can do for another person; it requires mental and spiritual energy that could be used on something else. That's going way beyond his job description - way beyond "eye-service" and "people pleasing." It is the Lord Christ whom he serves.

As you do your work this week seek to serve the Lord. Seek to do your work the way Jesus would if he had your job. Seek to embody the fruit of the Spirit. Invest in people by praying for them. Look for opportunities to explain the hope within you. Every single person you encounter in your work is created in the image of God; every single person you encounter in your work is fighting a great battle (sometimes one that NOBODY else knows about); every single person you encounter in your work matters to God and should therefore matter to you. Therefore, ***serve Christ through your work.***