

# Colossians 3:22–4:1

*A Ministry in the Word*

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## Scripture Reading

*Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.*

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## This Relationship Belongs to a Different Category

The household relationships covered in chapter 3 divide into two kinds. Wives and husbands, children and fathers — these belong to the created order. They exist because God made man as man and woman, and instituted marriage and the family at the creation. The servant and master relationship is different in origin: it exists because sin has come in. Men made slaves out of other men — that is a consequence of the fall, not of creation. Yet the New Testament does not address it by calling for the overthrow of society. The gospel comes and changes hearts; and when hearts are changed, the character of these relationships changes from within. The Lord Christ enters into the heart of the bondman, and that transforms everything.

## Not Eyeservice — Singleness of Heart, Fearing the Lord

The contrast in verse 22 is pointed: not with eyeservice as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. Eyeservice is the kind of work that is done when the master's eye is upon it — when the master is watching, things are done properly; when his back is turned, the effort drops away. The motive behind eyeservice is self: the goal is to be noticed by the master and to benefit by it. It is a very old human tendency — seen in Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, in whom self was the spring of every action. There was one servant of whom it was said *behold my servant* — in whom there was nothing of self, who was willing to go to the depths to redeem at great cost to Himself.

The Christian bondman is called to work in the consciousness that the Lord sees, not the master. It is not fearing God in the abstract but fearing the Lord — His lordship is what is specifically in view. He is the true Master of the bondman, and it is under His eye that all the work is done. The human master is the immediate one according to the flesh; the Lord is the ultimate one, and it is His lordship that gives character to how the service is rendered.

### **Heartily — As to the Lord**

Verse 23 lifts the principle to its most general expression: *whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men*. This is not limited to bondmen — it is a universal principle applied to their particular case. Do it heartily: with the whole soul behind it, not half-heartedly, not grudgingly, not watching the clock. As to the Lord — the Lord is before the heart, and that is what gives the act its character. The work is done unto men in the sense that men are its immediate object; but the motive, the spirit, the inner set of the heart is toward the Lord.

Worship shapes service — not the other way around. It is when the heart has first been in the presence of the Lord that the character of service flows rightly. Cain had it backwards: he thought service would flow into worship. That error has characterised much of Christendom. But the order here is: singleness of heart,

fearing the Lord — and from that comes the heartily. The heart is already touched before the hand begins to work.

### **The Inheritance — Even for a Bondman**

Verse 24 contains a remarkable statement: *of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ*. An inheritance for a slave — that belongs to the category of grace, not of nature. In the ordinary course, a slave does not inherit. He is property, not an heir. But this bondman, serving the Lord Christ, is to receive the recompense of an inheritance from the Lord. He is loved, not merely used. And the inheritance that awaits him is the one that moth cannot corrupt and thieves cannot steal — permanent, founded by God, answered to by that city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). Those who did not bargain with God receive what He freely gives. The Lord Christ — that strong expression, bringing together His lordship and His messiahship — is the one these bondmen serve. God hath made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). To serve the Lord Christ is the highest dignity open to any creature.

### **No Respect of Persons — A Transitional Verse**

Verse 25 — *he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong he hath done, and there is no respect of persons* — is beautifully positioned as a bridge between servant and master. It states a principle that applies to both. The bondman who wrongs his master will answer for it. The master who wrongs his bondman will answer for it. God is not partial. He does not look at the dignity of the person before deciding whether to act. The wealthy master has no advantage before God over the poorest slave. This is the even-handedness of God that Abraham expressed with such confidence: *shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* He does all things right. And He is not partial in His sovereignty — He has chosen the poor things of this world, the things that are not (1 Corinthians 1), not

because He favours them over others as persons, but to bring down the pride of man.

## **Masters — Give What Is Just and Fair**

Chapter 4:1 addresses the masters: *give unto your bondmen that which is just and fair, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven*. The word fair — Darby's rendering rather than equal — leaves room for the exercise of conscience. Just and fair is what the owner of the vineyard in Matthew 20 did: *friend, I do thee no wrong* — absolute righteousness — while at the same time showing goodness to those who came at the eleventh hour. There is no conflict between justice and goodness in God. The master who knows he has a Master in heaven is to reflect that character in his dealings.

The epistle to Philemon gives a glimpse of what this looks like when both master and servant are believers: *not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved... both in the flesh and in the Lord* (Philemon 16). That is the transformation grace achieves. Our passage does not take up that special case — it addresses the general situation of the believing master and the believing servant in an ordinary household. But both are called to the same thing: to seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at God's right hand. That seeking is what transforms the character of both service and mastery. The Master in heaven — capital M — is the one of chapter 3:1. He is Christ, seated at the right hand of God, awaiting the moment when His enemies are made His footstool. Every earthly master who knows he has that Master in heaven will govern his own household accordingly.