

The MYSTERY

Hidden for Ages

Is Now REVEALED

A Study of the Book of Colossians

This Week's Passage:
Colossians 3:22—4:1
 New International Version (NIV)

²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

4 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

**Day One: Read Colossians
 3:1—4:1.
 Then reread 3:22—4:1.**

Memory Verse: Colossians 3:17

¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

“The inclusion of slaves in this series of household regulations might appear odd to us, but not so to the original readers”¹, for “the household in the first century included the slaves as well as members of the family proper.”² Nevertheless, the master-slave relationship is different from the other kinds of relationships in Paul’s list: “The relationships between husbands and wives and parents and children are ordained by God from creation. ... On the other hand, the kind of servitude practiced in the first century was seldom in keeping with God’s will; the Scriptures regulate the institution [of slavery] without commending it...”³ In this passage, then, “Paul does not condone the Roman system of servitude but instead provides instructions to believing masters and slaves... regarding their relationship to each other in the Lord. Such instruction clearly sows the seeds for the eventual dismantling of this unjust socioeconomic structure...”⁴

1. What are believing slaves called to do? (v. 22a)

What should *not* characterize their service? (v. 22b)

What *should* characterize their service? (v. 22b)

Now read the parallel passage in Ephesians 6:5–8 and see if there is anything you can add to your answers above.

2. Although Paul does not mention it here, there is an exception to this command to obey. What is it? (Acts 5:27–29, especially verse 29)

Day Two: Read Colossians 3:22—4:1.

3. What understanding is key to helping the slave “work...with all [his or her] heart? (vv. 23b, 24b)

Why do you think this understanding would bring about a change in the way the slave viewed and performed the work his earthly master gave him to do?

“[I]t would be a mistake to think there is a one-to-one correspondence between the slave/master relationship in the first century and the employee/employer relationship today.”⁵ The most important distinction between these two relationships is of course that with slavery, “one human owns and has virtually ultimate control over another.”⁶ Despite this crucial difference, the “basic principles”⁷ Paul is conveying apply to both first-century slaves and modern-day employees.

4. Whatever the job is, paid or unpaid, and wherever it takes place (at home or in an office, store, school, etc.), people are often tempted not to work up to the standards Paul lays out in verse 22.
 - a. What does/would “eye-service, as people-pleasers” (ESV), or working “only when their eye is on you and to win their favor,” look like for you in the work you are called to do?
 - b. What practical steps can you take to fight the temptation to work this way?
 - c. What does/would working “with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord” look like for you in the work you are called to do?

- d. What practical steps can you take to cultivate this godly attitude more and more?

Day Three: Read Colossians 3:22—4:1.

5. What promise does Paul hold out for slaves whose faith is in Jesus? (v. 24a)

Why do you think this promise would be especially meaningful to someone who was a slave—that is, someone who did not own property but was owned by somebody else?

What does scripture say about this inheritance?

Col. 1:12

Heb. 1:14

Jas. 2:5

1 Pet. 1:3–5

Rev. 21:1–7

Inheritance

William Hendriksen makes the following observations about an “inheritance”:
“a. it is *a gift* (a person does not *earn* an inheritance), b. it is *inalienable* [it cannot be taken away]..., c. it *was willed* to the person who receives it, and...is therefore his *by right*...”⁸

6. What sobering caution does Paul add in verse 25?

Day Four: Read Colossians 3:22—4:1.

7. Now Paul addresses masters. What command does he give them? (4:1a)

Of what does Paul remind masters in the second part of this verse?

8. Why is the reminder that masters “also have a Master in heaven” (4:1) an incentive for them to treat their slaves “justly and fairly” (ESV)?

9. What more does Paul say to masters in Ephesians 6:5–9, the parallel passage to ours?

What effects should Paul’s commands to masters have on the way you view and treat those under your authority?

Day Five: Read Colossians 3:22—4:1.

10. What did Christian slaves and masters have in common? (vv. 22, 23, 24b; 4:1)

11. How do you think the teaching in this passage undermines the very notion of slavery?

Sam Storms sums up our section of Colossians this way: “[A]ll of life, whether in work or family or ministry, be it immensely significant or utterly mundane, all of life...is subject to the sovereignty and governed by the lordship and ultimately lived to the glory of Jesus our Lord.”⁹

12. Think about the various roles you play in your life, all the different hats you wear. Choose one that you find difficult or that you are tempted to feel is unimportant or even pointless. Pray that God would use this teaching from Colossians to transform the way you view that specific area of work and to enable you to do it “to the glory of Jesus our Lord.”¹⁰



Reminder: Remember to read the entire book of Colossians this week.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 293.

² Everett F. Harrison, *Colossians: Christ All-Sufficient* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 99.

³ *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2299, note on 3:22–25.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, 2299, note on 4:1.

⁵ Sam Storms, *The Hope of Glory: 100 Daily Meditations on Colossians* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 309.

⁶ Moo, 308.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ William Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 174.

⁹ Storms, 311.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*