

# Who is the Real Boss?

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Part 12 in the series *set Your Minds*...a study of Colossians  
Colossians 3:22-4:1  
December 18, 2011

Today we wrap up our mini-series on relationships. We looked at marriage, parenting and now the workplace. There are approximately 154 million people in the workplace including 7.2% (or 11.1 million) that are currently unemployed. What does God have to say about the place we spend at least 35% of our time at? Your work matters to God...but the relationships there are even more important.

## I. The Context of Employment

### A. Slavery as the backdrop

1. Slaves were “things” in the eyes of the law dating back to Aristotle.
2. There was no code of working conditions (Ex. Egyptian slave masters/ bricks)
3. If they ran away and were caught, he was branded on the forehead with the letter F (for fugitive) and could be put to death without trial.
4. Once he was too old to work, they were thrown out to die. Could not marry; could inherit nothing!
5. They could co-habit and have a child, but it became the “property” of the “owner”

B. Summary: All the rights belonged to the masters...and all the duties belonged to the slave!”

## II. The Conduct of Employees (v.22)

*22Slaves, 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.*

A. What should a godly employee do?

**“Obey your earthly masters in everything”.**

1. Servants” is doulos (δουλος), “slaves.” These were Christian slaves working for the most part in the service of pagan masters. Slaves were considered part of the household and this is why Paul covers this in this section.
2. Historians tell us there were over 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. This was about ½ of the population. This is why this section was longer than the brief injunctions to the family. Everyone had a “vested” interest in this teaching!
3. Note: He writes more about slaves than family because Onesimus the runaway slave (Col. 4:9) is going along with Tychicus to deliver this letter and the letter to Philemon (Onesimus’ Master) who also lived in Colossae.
4. Moreover there may well have been more slaves in the Colossian church than masters (1 Cor.1:26). The friction inherent in this situation probably called for extended comments on master-slave relationships in the body of Christ and in this church particularly. (Constable)

## B. Why doesn’t Paul condemn slavery?

1. It is more important for Christians to carry out our mission as Christians, in whatever social conditions we find ourselves, than it is for us to make changing those conditions our primary concern (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 7:20-22) (Weirsbe)
2. Slaves in the Roman Empire were similar to domestic servants in Victorian Britain. We have a picture of slaves coming from Africa to America.
3. Paul’s letter to Philemon underscores his attitude toward slavery. He advises Philemon not to treat Philemon severely, but as a brother even though he was still a slave.

*I Cor. 7:20-22: "Let each man remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman; likewise, he who was called while free is Christ's slave".*

4. Remember: Christians made up a tiny minority of the Roman Empire. They did not have the political or military clout to overthrow the system.
  5. Interestingly throughout history wherever Christians have constituted a significant segment of the population and have followed Paul's directions here, the slave system has died. (Constable)
  6. Our modern day parallel is in the work environment. We should work and serve them as we would the Lord; Only exception not to obey: When they ask you to do something illegal, unethical, or immoral!
- C. What qualities should characterize our work?  
4 characteristics of a godly employee...
1. **Integrity**: Lit "eye service"
    - Not just when they are watching; our integrity is seen in our work ethic. *"Don't work hard only when your master is watching...work hard all the time, a though working for Christ" Eph. 6:6-7 (LB).*
    - Examples: When the coach isn't looking, you don't run as hard; taking extended "breaks" when the boss isn't around
    - **Illustration**: LA County Flood Control department
  2. **Honesty**:
    - With sincerity of heart;
    - *"...followers of the Lord keep their promises even when it hurts" Prov. 15:4 (NLT).*
    - **Handling the cash drop on Christmas Eve at May Company when I was 16 years old.**

3. **Pure Motives:**

- Not just to “*win favor*”
- They aren’t manipulators or people pleasers.
- **The pay is good and I can walk to work.**  
John F. Kennedy

4. **Respect:**

- Fearing (Reverence for) the Lord; v. 24. It is the Lord you are serving. Your tasks become transformed.
- **Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the love of Jesus. Mother Teresa**
- This makes no distinction about the severity of the work or whether it is pleasant! **Ex. working at the sausage company stripping casings)**

D. Why should we respond that way? (v. 23-25)

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

1. Because hard work **honors** God!

- The essence of relationships in Christianity is wrapped up in v.23: *Whatever you do... “Work at it with all your heart....wholeheartedly”*. The Christian life is lived “in Christ”!
- Contrast Amaziah: *“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly”*. (2 Chron. 25:2).
- **The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary. Vince Lombardi**

2. Because God will **reward** you!

*“Your reward is an inheritance from God” (v. 24).*

- The inheritance is received as a result of work; it does not come as a gift. God rewards faithfulness!

- Slaves wouldn't share in the profits so the assumption was they were lazy.
  - *Their ultimate reward as is ours is from God. II Cor. 5:10*
3. Because your **real boss** is God!
- "It is the Lord Christ you are serving".*
- Because you are actually working for the Lord, not men: Even if the boss is demanding, dishonest, disagreeable, defensive or demeaning.
  - Distinguish between their personality and their position! The themes of authority repeat themselves!
  - **False View of work: "Work is a necessary evil to be avoided". Mark Twain**
4. Because even if you are **mistreated**, God will make it right!
- "A wrong will be repaid".*
- God promises retribution for unfaithfulness
  - "The recent fault of Onesimus would make the apostle doubly anxious to emphasize the duties of the slave towards the master, lest in his love for the offender, he should seem to condone the offence. But on the other hand, it is the apostle's business to show that justice has a double edge. There must be reciprocity between the master and the slave. The philosophers of Greece taught, and the laws of Rome assumed, that the slave was just a mere possession.
  - Doubtless Paul meant it as a warning to Christian slaves not to presume on their position before God and think that he would overlook their misdeeds. In the parallel passage in Ephesians it is the master who is reminded that there is no partiality with God, while here it is the slave.

- *“There is no favoritism”*. God will take care of both the unjust master and the dishonest slave.  
*Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. Eph. 6:9*

### III. The Character of Employers (v. 4:1)

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

#### A. What should a godly employer do?

1. What? Treat all employees with **respect!**
2. How?
  - **Justly (Right) *dikaion***: Justice (NASB): Remember they had no rights!
  - **Fairly: *isotēta***, “equitable”
3. Why?
  - God is the ultimate model of healthy relationships.
  - God is watching to see if you are treating them fairly. What goes around comes around; reap what you sow; how would you like your Heavenly master to treat you?  
*“Because you know you also have a Master in heaven”*
  - If you realize you really answer to God, you will be concerned for their welfare.

### IV. The Conclusion about Employment

#### A. Our **integrity** is seen in our work ethic

*“A lazy person is as bad as someone who destroys things.”  
Prov. 18:9 (NLT)*

1. **By working faithfully eight hours a day you may eventually get to be boss and work twelve hours a day. Robert Frost**
2. God will use you in the workplace to validate

B. Everything we do is a **reflection** on God

*“Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable”  
Rom.12:17(NLT)*

1. God’s reputation is at stake if we steal, cheat, are lazy, etc.
2. **Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all. Sam Ewing**

C. We all have someone to **serve**! Our ultimate “boss” is God!

*“Live life with a due sense of responsibility...” Eph. 5:15 (Phi)*

1. **Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing. Theodore Roosevelt**
2. We all need to serve somewhere in God’s work...either at church or in the workplace or in a ministry. Each of those places has a boss!
3. **Conclusion: Everyone is in submission to someone. We are all under authority in some arena in life...Whether in marriage ...in the home...or in the work place! The bottom line: we all serve someone. Who do you need to serve?**

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