

## God-Centered Work

*Colossians 3:22-4:1; April 22, 2018*

My sermon today is the third sermon in our series *Work: Overflowing in the 9-5*. As I prepared for this sermon, I did a lot of reflecting on my work experiences.

- **Early life:**
  - I don't know about you guys, but work started early for me. My parents put me to work doing anything and everything around the house. Cutting the grass, taking out the trash, vacuuming the house, cleaning the the bathrooms, you name it.
  - I specifically remember my older brother one day saying, "Jon, the goal of vacuuming isn't just how fast you can cover every square inch of the house with the vacuum. If the carpet isn't clean, your job isn't done."
- **Added Touch Landscaping**
  - But in are seriousness, my first real job was with *Added Touch* Landscaping. This business was owned by a believer in my church and I worked for him in my summers in High School and when I was home from college. It was here where I learned many of the foundational things to working well: showing up on time, being dependable, learning how to use new tools and pieces of equipment, and then working hard and well. This is where I first experienced what it was like to work for someone else (my boss) and with others (co-workers).
  - Sidenote: I enjoy working outside with my hands. I spent most of my day yesterday doing landscaping at my house here in Medford.
- **Ski Beech Ski Instructor**
  - I had job in college for four months (December - March) as a Ski Instructor. I didn't make much money from this job but I got to ski for free, and that was my primary motivation for doing the job. Here I experienced and enjoyed the benefits that come with certain jobs.
- **Intern at Ridgecrest Baptist Church and Youth Minister at Gorman Baptist Church**
  - While in seminary, I was able to gain valuable ministry experience through interning at one church and then serving as a youth minister as another church. It's one thing to learn knowledge about ministry and a very different thing to actually practice it.
- **Server at P. F. Changs**
  - When decided to move here to plant RHC I needed to find a job. With a BS in Applied Communication, A Master of Divinity and 3 years into a Ph.D., my options were limited. So what did I do? I applied for a job at my wife's favorite restaurant, P. F. Changs. I applied to be a server.
  - There are two things about my interview that I still remember. The first, one of the managers asked me, "Are you going to try proselytize and try to convert us?" Second, I remember saying, "I've never been a server before in my life, but Jesus in the Bible talks a ton about serving and I promise you, I'll be one of the best servers you've ever had."
  - My goal there was to be the best server I could be for the glory of God.

- It was there that I really for the first time had to wrestle with a number of issues related to thinking and acting Christ-like in all of my work.
  - Servers make like \$2/hour (which they never see because it all goes to taxes) and make their living on tips alone.
  - Was I going to stereotype every one of my guests based on what I thought they might tip me?
  - Was I going to base my level of service on what I thought they might tip me?
  - How was I going to respond when there was \$0 left for the tip?
  - How was I going to respond when the restaurant was dead and I had no tables to wait on?
  - How was I going to respond when just about every other server was cursing non-stop and complaining about their guests?
  - How was I going to respond when my guests were upset because their food was late or not correct or not the right temperature and I had done everything right?
  - What was I going to do at the end of the night when I had to report the total amount of my tips? Would I just report the bare minimum, what was recorded on a credit card slip, or would I report what I received in cash as well?
- **Pastor at Redemption Hill Church**
  - And now I'm a pastor at RHC.

*Transition:*

- The questions that I wrestled with we all wrestle with. Who do we work for? Who are we seeking to please with our work? What kind of work do we do when no one is watching?
- Today we're going to look at a text that has great implications for how we are to view and carryout our work as followers of Jesus.

*Context:*

- Paul spends the first half of Colossians teaching about the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 1:21-22) and then in the second half of his book he calls the church to live particular kinds of lives in response to what God has done for them in Jesus.
  - Read Col. 2:6: *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him."*
  - Read Col. 3:1-3: *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."*
  - Read Col. 3:17: *"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*
- The point from Col. 3:17 is that Jesus changes everything about us ("do everything..."). In view of this, Paul continues giving instructions for how believers are to walk as

followers of Jesus in the home.

- Wives (3:18)
  - Husbands (3:19)
  - Children (3:20)
  - Fathers (3:21)
  - Bondservants (3:22-25)
  - Masters (4:1)
- A few qualifiers before we jump in:
    1. For my purposes today, I'm not going to spend much time discussing the NT teachings related to the words, servant, bondservant, slave and master. It's not that I don't think those are important matters, my purpose today is to help us think about broader principles to shape how we approach our work. I will say this in short: I like how the ESV Study Bible summarizes the issue. It says, "the Scriptures regulate the institution without commending it (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21; Eph. 6:5; 1 Tim. 1:10) and the evil of trafficking human beings is condemned in the NT (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; cf. Rev. 18:11-13)."
    2. There is no direct parallel for us today to apply these truths. None of us are bondservants and masters in the same sense of what was occurring in the first century.
    3. Just because the direct application is not the same for us doesn't mean that there aren't principles that we can draw from and apply to a similar context, that of work, particularly between those above us (employers) and those underneath us (employees). What we can do is derive a theology of work from these teachings that we can then apply to our particular and individual context.

**Read Colossians 3:22 - 4:1:** *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. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

- Whether you are an employer or an employee, one thing that's clear is that pleasing God, fearing God, working for the Lord should be the central aim of all our work. And that's the main point that all of the implications from this text are going to hang on.

**The Point: Make pleasing God the central aim of all your Work**

- *Transition: If pleasing God is the central aim of all our work then first of all we will....*

### **I. Work under the Authority of God.**

**Explain the Text:**

- There are "earthly masters" and then there is *the* Master in heaven (3:22; 4:1)
  - From the very first command to bondservants, Paul is implicitly reminding them that there is a greater master over these "earthly" masters.

- Since there is a heavenly master who is over all, we should work to please him and not people (3:22; 23)
- Paul gives two main motivations for working to please the Lord:
  - The Lord rewards (3:24)
    - This would've instill hope in the bondservants as they probably saw very few rewards in their lifetime.
  - The Lord punishes (3:25).
    - This would've give bondservants comfort knowing that their mistreatment by others would be punished by God one day.
- Our work should reflect the values of God's kingdom (ie. Justice, fairness; 4:1).

### **Implications of the Text:**

- We primarily work in such a way as to please God, not people, because we will give an account to him one day.
  - God is the master of all and every CEO will one day give an account before God.
- None of my work will go unnoticed and unrewarded by God
  - Do you know what the Lord's reward is? It's the joy of knowing and experiencing the presence of God forever. He is the inheritance. This is a reward that can not be taken away and will last forever.
- None of the injustices that I face will go unnoticed and unpunished by God.
- Our work should reflect the values of God's kingdom.
  - Our primary goal isn't just getting things done, we must make sure we are getting the *right* things done and in the *right* way. Matt Perman would say it's *effectiveness* over *efficiency*.
  - The more time you spend with God, pursuing him, hearing from him in his Word, the more you'll learn about the values of the kingdom so you can apply them to your work.
  - This goes counter cultural to the way the most of our world operates. The world says the way to success is to put yourself first and crush others. The gospel says, sacrifice, love and serve others.

## **II. Work in the Presence of God.**

### **Explain the Text:**

- The negative: Col. 3:22 says that they shouldn't work "by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers."
  - These are people who work only when people are watching and their primary aim is to please others. They just try to do the bare minimum.
  - Ills: "Boss Button for March Madness"
    - Slide #1: Regular March Madness Website (highlight Boss Button at the top right).
    - Slide #2: When you click the "boss button," this is what shows up on your screen.

- You need a larger motivation than just people pleasing because there's a lot of work we do that no one ever sees. When people aren't watching, we're tempted to cut corners and slack off. A larger issue though is that when we work to please people, there's a self-serving pursuit of glory that we're after that only belongs to God.
  - "Any time we attempt to rob God of his glory, we consequently rob ourselves of joy because we make ourselves slaves to the opinions of men?" (Phillips Holmes, in an article on Desiring God about work).
- What does your work look like when no one is watching?
- Do you find yourself a slave to the opinions of others? There's a better way.
- The positive: "but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (3:22-23).
  - We are to work as if we were working for the Lord himself, not people.

### **Implications of the Text:**

- Our work should be *coram Deo*.
  - This is a Latin phrase that means "in the presence of God" or "before the face of God."
  - R. C. Sproul explains it this way: "To live *coram Deo* is to live one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God. To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God" (article on [www.ligonier.com](http://www.ligonier.com)).
- To work this way requires an intentional mindset.
  - One of the best short reads on Biblical Productivity is a little book by Tim Challies called "Do More Better." In one of the chapters he talks about his daily planning phase which he titles, "*coram Deo*." I've adopted it for myself and the very first step of my day is a reflection on this principle and then prayer to God for strength to help me live this way today.
- Working this way changes everything:
  - Our motivations change.
  - Our work changes, especially when people aren't watching.
  - Our response to interruptions change.
    - Our natural and sinful responses to interruptions usually lead us to respond with anger or despair.
    - Challies, points us to a quote by C. S. Lewis concerning how he viewed interruptions. Lewis says this, "The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's 'own,' or 'real' life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life—the life God is sending one day by day; what one calls one's 'real life' is a phantom of one's own imagination."
    - Once we begin living *coram Deo* we begin to realize that God is completely sovereign and he does a better job of planning our days and lives than we do. We begin to trust him concerning even in the

interruptions. In fact, knowing this, maybe we should build more margin in our days so that we can proactively prepare for the things that we can't even see but which we know God will bring.

*Transition: As we think of working for the Lord and to please him, note that we don't work to gain his acceptance or to meet his needs, we work because we are already accepted by him and to meet the needs of others.*

### **III. Work by the Grace and Power of God.**

#### **Explain the Text:**

- Paul says we are to “work heartily” (3:23).
  - Literally, this phrase means “work from the soul.” Often times in Scripture the words for “soul” and “heart” are used synonymously but one commentator notes that if there is a difference it is “...in the fact that “soul” stresses the life principle and expended energy, rather than the pure choice which comes from the heart. Thus one may choose to work from the heart, but the actual work done comes from the life source itself.”
- Look back at Col. 1:28-29
  - Paul toils with God's energy.
  - Read 1 Cor. 15:10: *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*

#### **Implications of the Text:**

- I realize that many days we wake up not trying to serve, just trying to survive. But by God's grace, we can move forward to something that is better.
- The power behind our work is the grace and power of God in our lives. Grace refers to the undeserved favor of God that is ours in Jesus. In view of this, we don't work to earn God's favor or acceptance; we already have that in Jesus.
- This grace is so great that it empowers the Christian life. In fact, as John Piper notes, “The grace of God is so decisive and powerful in the good work I am doing that it is fitting to say I am not doing it.”
- If we are going to work “heartily” for the Lord, we must work with a deep, humble and constant dependence upon God.

### **IV. Work for the Good of Others to the Glory of God.**

#### **Explain the Text:**

- The opposite of people pleasing is God pleasing, which means living not to bring glory to myself, but to bring glory to God, to make much of him. Another way to talk of bringing glory to God is to magnify him, but you can magnify in one of two ways: like a microscope and a telescope (Piper). A microscope makes things appear larger than they really are. This isn't what we are about. A telescope makes something that is

unimaginably great appear for what it really is.

- The way God is magnified and glorified in our lives is through good works.
- Read Matthew 5:16
  - *“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*
    - “Your good works are like a light, and when that light shines, it illuminates God. When people see that light, they aren’t meant to look at you and say, ‘He’s incredible’ or ‘She’s amazing.’ They are meant to look at God and say, ‘He is awesome’” (Challies, 12).
    - “Jesus calls you to let your light shine before others, and this light is more like a dimmer switch than a simple on and off button. You can reflect more or less of that light to shine before men” (Challies, 24).
  - Cross References:
    - Tit. 2:14: *“who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*
    - See also Tit. 3:8; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10
  - What are good works? These aren’t just “spiritual things.” Good works can be anything we do in faith, including the very mundane activities of our everyday jobs.

### **Implications of the Text:**

- Our work should be about doing good works to others for the glory of God.
  - Our prayer each morning should be, “God, by your power and grace, help me to turn the dimmer switch of my life all the way so that you might be brought glory through my life.”
  - How do I tell the difference between people-pleasing, pride and genuine love and service toward others?
    - Kevin DeYoung suggests this simple question: “Am I trying to do good or to make myself look good?”
- If doing good works is what bring God glory, then I should leverage my life to do as much good as possible.
- John Wesley: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can” (quoted by Perman, 75).
  - This is why we should care about productivity. The more productive I am the more good I can do for others and the more I can glorify God in my life.
    - If I can figure out how to do things quicker, faster and better then I’m increasing my potential to do more good.
    - Have you guys heard of the *Four-Hour Work Week* by Tim Ferriss?
      - Here’s his description: “Forget the old concept of retirement and the rest of the deferred-life plan—there is no need to wait and every reason not to. Whether your dream is escaping the rat race,

high-end world travel, monthly five-figure income with zero management, or just living more and working less, this book is the blueprint.”

- This isn't what I'm after. I'm not looking to retire early or travel more, I'm looking to do more better for the glory of God.
- Additionally, the better we are at productivity, the better we will be at larger and more difficult tasks.
- God hasn't just called us to randomly do good, we are to proactively do good. We are to make plans to do good.
- What do I mean by productivity?
  - “Productivity is effectively stewarding my gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God” (Challies)
  - Two key resources:
    - *Do More Better* by Tim Challies
    - *What's Best Next* by Matt Perman
  - “To a large degree, your personal productivity depends on identifying and using the best tools for the job and then growing in your skills in deploying them” (Challies, 46).
  - “Because you are so dependent on your tools, there is every reason to ensure that you are using the best tools. A doctor can probably do surgery with a utility knife if he needs to, but you would prefer that he operates on you with a scalpel, and a very high-quality scalpel at that. You can go out in your backyard and cut down a tree with a crowbar, but you will get the job done better if you use an axe. Yet many people try to be productive with tools that are poorly suited to the task” (Challies, 45-46).
  - Tim Challies walks you through adopting 3 essential tools:
    - Task Management Tool
      - A task management tool enables you to capture and organize your projects and tasks.
    - Scheduling Tool
      - A scheduling tool enables you to organize your time and notifies you of pending events and appointments.
    - Information Tool
      - An information tool enables you to collect, archive, and access information.
- A few specific encouragements on how to do good toward others (a number of these are from Matt Perman).
  - Put others first. Serve them.
  - Be eager to meet the needs of others.
  - Be proactive, not reactive, in doing good.
    - How can I serve this week?
      - This answers the question: “What must I do this week?”
    - How can I surprise this week?



- This answers the question: “What can I do this week?”
- Be creative and competent in doing good, not lazy and shoddy.

**Conclusion:**

- When we make pleasing God the central aim of all our work by working under the authority of God, in the presence of God, by the grace and power of God and for the good of others to the glory of God...it paves the way for the gospel.
- Let me be clear, our work in and of itself will not save anyone. But our work can remove barriers to the gospel and gain credibility for our faith.
  - We can work in such a way that either adorns the gospel or blemishes it.
  - Tim Keller, in *Center Church*, says, “if our work is shoddy, our verbal witness only leads listeners to despise our beliefs.”
- A book that had a really big impact on my life when I was in college is *Don't Waste Your Life* by John Piper. In there he's got a chapter called “Making Much of Christ from 8 to 5” where he says that we make much of God in our work by “having such high standards of excellence and such integrity and such manifest goodwill that we put no obstacles in the way of the Gospel but rather call attention to the all-satisfying beauty of Christ.”
- “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).