



## eLesson 011

**Text: Colossians 3:22 – 4:1**

**Subject: Employment**

### Colossians - Part 9

**Slavery?** The next relationship that Paul and Timothy wrote about in Colossians was that of slave and master ... writing almost twice the amount that they wrote about families. They did not write about the history and evils of slavery. They wrote about the impact of Jesus on the attitudes and behavior of slaves and masters. Although misused throughout history, slavery is one form of employee and employer relationships. This lesson is about employment in general ... about the impact of Jesus on employees and employers in today's workplace. If the instruction in these verses works within slavery, it can certainly work in our employment today. Their words to slaves apply to any Christian employee working for a believer ... or working for a non-believer. Their words to slave masters apply to any Christian employer or manager. This lesson is for all Christians in today's workplace ... for you in your workplace. Your workplace may be a secular company, Christian organization, or a church. Do not depersonalize this lesson by simply thinking of the corporation or institution as your employer. The word *employer* in this lesson denotes a person (possibly you) who hires or manages others in the workplace. For this lesson, your employer is the person that directly manages you at your place of work. If you are in middle management, you are both employer and employee. Before continuing this lesson, it would be good for you to read Colossians 3:22 - 4:1, Ephesians 6:5-9, 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Titus 2:9-10, 1 Peter 2:18-24, and Genesis 3:17-19.

**Slavery was a common form of employment.** In Paul and Timothy's day, slavery was common. However, the uncommon thing was the Gospel's impact on the relationship between slave and master. There must have been an interesting mix of believers in the church at Colossae ... slaves and slave masters together in the assembly. There were believing slave-masters. Probably some were fair and just ... and some were not. Some slaves might have had believing masters ... but probably many did not. An older slave might have been an elder in that church since being an influential or successful businessman is not one of the qualifications for spiritual leadership. One of the slave masters might have been a new or young believer. His elder in the Church might have been a slave ... possibly even his own slave. Paul and Timothy's words applied to that interesting mix ... to all the slaves and slave masters in the church at Colossae. Their words also apply to all believers today who are employees and/or employers.

**Genesis 3 is the place to begin.** It tells us what to expect from employment. Work was much easier before sin entered our world. After Adam sinned, God said, "*Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground.*" Genesis 3:17-19.

Paraphrased for today ... *work will be difficult*. God graciously provided this opposition in our fallen world to give us greater opportunity to recognize our need of Him. It is true that diligent work generally produces better results than laziness, Proverbs 6:1-11, 19:15, 20:4, 20:13, and 24:30-34. However, we have no Biblical promise that hard work invariably produces earthly prosperity, promotion, position, prestige, or power. God may bless you with those things if He chooses ... or He may not, 1 Samuel 2:7, James 1:17. Earthly success is not a guaranteed product of spirituality ... nor is it an indication of spirituality. However, one guarantee that we do have is this ... *work will be difficult*.

**"Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters."** Colossians 3:22 might be paraphrased for today as ...*employee, obey your employer*. The same type of exception applies here as did in the previous two lessons (for wives not submitting and for children not obeying). The Lordship of Christ over an employee's life must take precedence over an employer's demand that an employee sin. In all of life, we must obey the Lord. Being an employee does not change this. Some Christians falsely assume that they are excused from personal responsibility for sin committed under their employers' orders ... such as a secretary told to lie for the boss, an accountant told to falsify tax reports, or a nurse or doctor ordered by the hospital or clinic to abort a baby. These things are wrong. Each of us is individually responsible for our own actions ... even when following the orders of our employer. Obey your employer unless doing so violates the Lordship of Christ in your life. However, you should always honor your employer, 1 Timothy 6:1. Some Christians do not honor their employers. Some steal time or resources from their employers to witness or do church work. Some believers are offensively religious in their workplace. Christians should not be silent about the Gospel in their workplace. However, as a witness you must not be offensive. The message of Jesus will offend some people ... but you as the messenger should not. Make your faith known in your workplace ... remembering that Jesus said, *"Be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves."* Matthew 10:16. Present the Gospel with boldness ... but also with honor, integrity, and sensitivity. Christian employees should work heartily. By being the best employees, believers demonstrate and adorn the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**"Do your work heartily," Colossians 3:23.** Christians should work diligently and honorably even when their earthly employers are not watching, 3:22 ... *"doing the will of God from the heart."* Ephesians 6:6. A Christian employee should *"with good will, render service,"* Ephesians 6:7 ... being *"well-pleasing, not argumentative,"* Titus 2:9. Christians should not steal from their employers, Titus 2:10. Could you expect God to bless your music ministry when you have made copies of copyrighted sheet music on the company copy machine? Should you use bootlegged company software in your ministry? If you worked in an automobile factory, you would not take home a sample. What if you worked for a factory that made teacups or pencils? Would taking home a few samples be stealing? Of course, it would. Taking something without permission or payment, no matter what it costs, is stealing. The employee who steals a car is a thief ... as is the one who steals a teacup or pencil ... as is the one who steals time from their employer. Most Christians would never steal a week's salary from a cash drawer at their place of work. However, stealing a little less than one hour each week from an employer adds up to about that amount in one year. Hypocrites make ineffective witnesses. An employee of unquestionable integrity can be a witness of unquestionable impact.

**"As for the Lord rather than for men," Colossians 3:23.** Perspective is the main issue here. Christian employee, you work for a higher master. Jesus is your master and there is none better. Work as for Him. Labor as a slave of Christ in your place of employment, Ephesians 6:6. You need to keep that focus. With singleness of heart, keep your focus on your true master. *"it is the Lord Christ whom you serve."* Colossians 3:24. Do your work for Him. Know that He will reward you as His heir

rather than as a slave, 3:24. Inheritances are given to children, not to slaves. You may be treated unfairly by your earthy master. However, your work will be fairly and justly rewarded by your Father in heaven, 3:23-25. God will not under compensate you.

**You have one primary purpose in your work.** It is not to gain earthly prosperity, promotion, position, prestige, or power. Earthly success may come as a byproduct of your working as for the Lord ... or it may not. Work diligently to achieve your full potential as a good steward of the abilities and talents that God has entrusted to you. Achieving your full employment potential is good ... but it is not your primary work purpose. Your primary work purpose is not even survival (to provide food and shelter). We pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread."* Matthew 6:11 ... then we work to gather up the bread that God gives to us. In that way, we do work to survive ... but that is not our primary purpose at work. Our primary work purpose is not self-fulfillment ... a misconception of modern Western society. Do not let yourself be squeezed into that worldly mold. Very few people in the world have any possibility or opportunity to gain personal fulfillment from their work. So then, what is your primary purpose at work? Your primary work purpose is simply this ... to testify of God by your work. Paul explained this in Titus 2:9-10, *"Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters ... showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect."* Your diligent work adorns or decorates the Gospel ... as a bride adorns herself for her husband, Revelation 21:2 ... and as the foundation of the New Jerusalem will be adorned with precious stones, Revelation 21:19. Paul wrote to his co-author, *"Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against."* 1 Timothy 6:1. Your work should bring honor, rather than dishonor, to the Gospel. Keep your focus. In any employment, you work for God as His representative to a lost and dying world. Your primary purpose in work is to adorn the Gospel of your Savior.

**Is your employer a believer ... or unreasonable ... or both?** Be very careful if your employer is a believer. Do not let your familiarity as fellow-believers make you disrespectful to your Christian employer. Instead, work more heartily ... serve all the more. *"Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved,"* 1 Timothy 6:2. You may even be your employer's elder or discipler. Then remember that at work, you are still the employee ... and that person is still your employer. Familiarity leading to disrespect is a very real danger in Christian organizations. It is important to grant appropriate honor to your earthly master ... even in a Christian organization. However, for most of us, it is more likely that our employers are non-believers. Maybe your earthly master is treating you harshly and unreasonably. You may be suffering unjustly ... overworked, underpaid, unrecognized, unfairly criticized, or even worse. You may feel like the Israelites in the iron furnace of Egyptian slavery during the time of Moses ... afflicted with hard labor ... compelled to labor rigorously ... with task masters seemingly committed to making your life bitter. Then Peter's words are for you, *"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,"* 1 Peter 2:18-21. If you are treated unfairly at your workplace ... then act like Jesus, *"who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously,"* 1 Peter 2:22-23. In your workplace, be Christ-like ... even if your employer is not.

**Christian employers have special opportunities.** If you are an employer, you can have a significant influence on your believing and non-believing employees. You can demonstrate the Gospel in your Christ-like shepherding of them. Paul and Timothy wrote, *"Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven."* Colossians 4:1. Paul also wrote, *"With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."* Ephesians 6:7-9. Christian employer, be just and fair ... serve with good will ... work as for God ... and do not threaten those entrusted to your care. Jesus said, *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* Matthew 5:16. Christian employer, do your employees see your good works and glorify your Father? As an employer ... let your light shine! Remember that the Lord will judge you and your employees without partiality. Your earthly position and power in the workplace will not give you special exemptions in Heaven. The Lord will judge you on your stewardship of the position and power that He has entrusted to you.

**Do not misinterpret the obvious.** From Genesis 3 it is obvious that work is difficult ... we earn our bread by hard work. Is your job difficult? Do not misinterpret that difficulty to mean that God is leading you to find an easier job. Expect your job to be difficult. Does your employer treat you unreasonably or even harshly? Do not misinterpret that to mean you should find a better boss or better job. You already have the best boss ... Jesus. You may be suffering as Jesus did ... following His example ... walking in His steps ... fulfilling your calling ... and finding favor with God. Do you really want to give all of that up for an easier job and easier earthly master? God may lead you to make some change in your employment. Be careful. Do not let difficult circumstances or difficult people disproportionately influence your determination of God's will. Work is difficult ... deal with it. Work is difficult ... keep your perspective. As a master or a slave, as an employer or an employee, in *"whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."* Colossians 3:17.



## Study Questions Answers at end of lesson.

1. How does Genesis 3:17-19 apply to employment today?
2. How does Colossians 3:22 apply to employment today?
3. Explain how Matthew 10:16 applies to witnessing at work.

4. What phrases should describe a Christian's job performance?
  
5. In any work situation, who is your real employer?
  
6. According to Colossians 3:24, what reward should we expect from our employment?
  
7. How is Matthew 6:11 relevant to your paycheck?
  
8. What is your primary purpose in your employment?
  
9. What temptation exists if your employer is a Christian?
  
10. What example should you follow if your employer unfairly treats you?
  
11. Is it always God's will for you to seek an easier job?



## Personal Reflection No answers provided for these questions.

1. What are some situations in which Christian employees should disobey employers?
  
2. In your answers to the above question, how could those employees still honor their employers?

3. How are some Christian employees not innocent as doves?
  
4. How can you be shrewd and innocent at the same time?
  
5. Describe your own work efforts?
  
6. How does your answer to that question adorn, or distract from, the Gospel?
  
7. How could a slave (or employee today) be an effective elder or discipler to his or her boss?
  
8. How should a Christian employee look at a raise, demotion, transfer, or termination?
  
9. How can a Christian employer make the maximum impact for Christ at work?
  
10. How does Matthew 6:11 apply to your raise ... or to any excess money that you are paid?
  
11. If you are generously paid (or overpaid) by your employer, will that change your rewards in Heaven according to Colossians 3:24?
  
12. How does Colossians 3:17 apply to you in your workplace?



## Answers to Study Questions

1. How does Genesis 3:17-19 apply to employment today? *Work is difficult!*
2. How does Colossians 3:22 apply to employment today? *Christians should be great employees seeking the Lord's approval rather than man's.*
3. Explain how Matthew 10:16 applies to witnessing at work. *Christians should be creative in their witnessing at work ... shrewd but innocent ... with integrity rather than hypocrisy.*
4. What phrases should describe a Christian's job performance? *Heartily ... from the heart ...with good will ...being well pleasing ... non-argumentative ...as for the Lord.*
5. In any work situation, who is your real employer? *The Lord.*
6. According to Colossians 3:24, what reward should we expect from our employment? *An inheritance from the Lord.*
7. How is Matthew 6:11 relevant to your paycheck? *We pray ... God gives us our daily bread ... we work to gather it up.*
8. What is your primary purpose in your employment? *To adorn the Gospel.*
9. What temptation exists if your employer is a Christian? *To let familiarity as believers lead the employee to disrespect, or take advantage of, his or her Christian boss.*
10. What example should you follow if your employer unfairly treats you? *The example of Jesus.*
11. Is it always God's will for you to seek an easier job? *No, not always.*

.....

This Acts One Eight eLesson, copyright 2004, is provided for your personal or group study. You may copy it, unchanged, for free distribution ... but only with this copyright statement attached. Bible quotations are from the New American Standard unless otherwise noted. Visit [www.eLessons.org](http://www.eLessons.org) for your own free e-mail subscription, to update your subscription, or to tell a friend about the eLessons. Additional lessons and info on other ministry resources are available on that site. Send questions and comments to [questions@eLessons.org](mailto:questions@eLessons.org).

