

Preeminent. Christ's Place in Your Walk

WEEK 15 Working for the Lord



“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.” (Colossians 3:22–4:1)

We have already addressed husbands and wives, and fathers and children. Now, we move to the more surprising pair—slaves and masters.

Christians probably reflected on this topic because of the widespread interest in household management and because the household was so vital to the life of the church. Since they affirmed that all believers had become equals in Christ, they were forced to deal with the question of how members of the family in various stations, such as masters, slaves, and freedmen, were to relate to one another in the household. They may also have desired to reverse popular opinion that Christians fomented social turmoil. The household rules show that Christians did not oppose the commonly shared moral norms of their culture concerning a well-ordered family life.¹

The household codes did not set out to abolish or reshape existing social structures, but to christianize them. As far as slavery was concerned, it took a

COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1 CORAM DEO

In the beginning, prior to sin, God assigned Adam and Eve important work. In Genesis 2 we read about man's first day of work: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15).

We were created to be stewards of God's creation through our work. The opening two chapters of Genesis provide a foundation for how God sees work, culture, and our responsibility. This same perspective extends throughout the Scriptures.

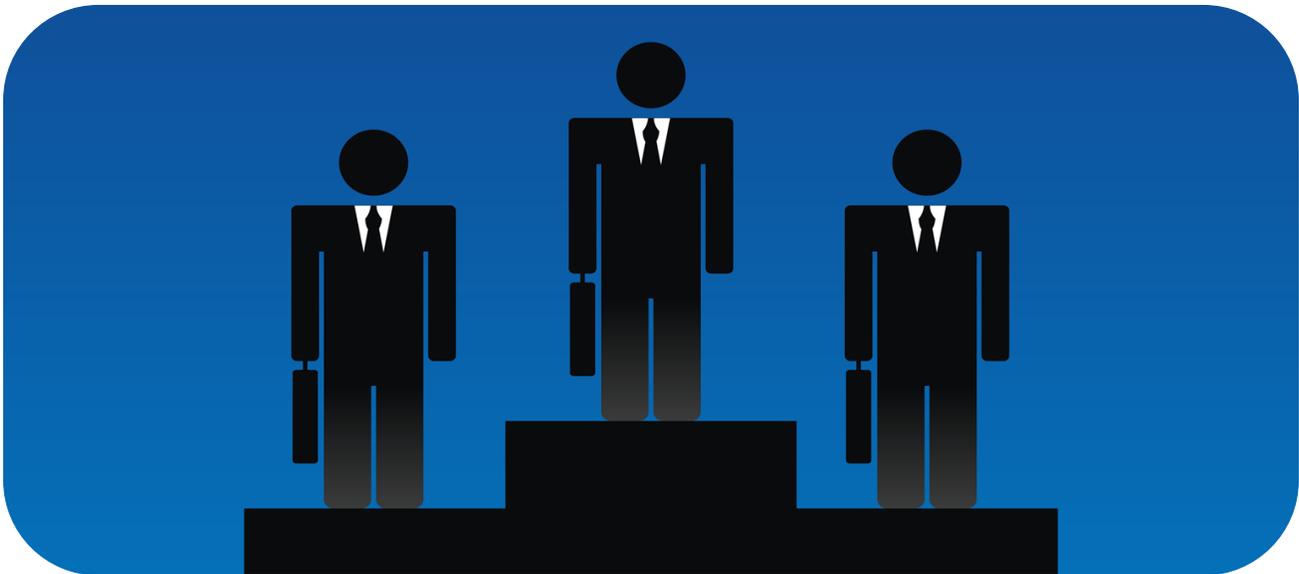
Work is not a curse, but a gift from God given to us before the fall, although the effects of the fall make our work frustrating and difficult at times (Genesis 3:17–19). By our work, we employ useful skills to glorify God, love our neighbors, and further God's kingdom.

¹David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary, Colossians/Philemon*, p. 241-242.

long time for the essential incompatibility of the institution with the ethic of the gospel or indeed with the biblical doctrine of creation, to be properly assimilated by the general Christian consciousness.²

The household codes do not give detailed advice for the complexities of modern industrialism. For that matter, they do not even give detailed advice for critical situations which might arise in the first century between master and slave, when one or both belonged to the Christian fellowship. Had such detailed advice been given, in place of the more general exhortations which are found in the codes, readers of other days would derive less help from them than they do. They embody basic and abiding Christian principles, which can be applied in changing social structures from time to time and from place to place.³

Paul's purpose was not to overturn the entire societal structure, but to teach us how to live within it. He begins with the home and all who live in it. And while slavery is alive and well in our world with an estimated 21–36 million people in some type of slavery,⁴ it is not something that most of us deal with on a daily basis. And while we are to seek the freedom of those caught in horrific and diabolical situations, in our everyday world, we seek to apply the principles Paul advocated—that of being good workers.



OPEN IT

1. What is the best job you have ever had? Why?

2. What is the worst job you have ever had? Why?

²F.F. Bruce, NICNT, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, p.171.

³Ibid.

⁴<http://www.freetheslaves.net/about-slavery/slavery-today/>, accessed on 18 March 2015.

READ IT | Colossians 3:22-4:1



EXPLORE IT

3. Who are bondservants supposed to obey (v. 22)?

4. How were bondservants to obey them (v. 22)?

5. Who are they really working for (v. 23)?

6. What will we receive if we do our work well for the Lord and not for men (v. 24)?

7. What will God do to those who take advantage of their bosses (v. 25)?

8. To whom are the masters ultimately accountable (4:1)?

GET IT

9. Do you think God cares about our work? Why or why not?

10. Why is it so tempting to do good work only when the boss is around?

11. Do you feel that Christians are doing their work for the Lord and not for men? Why?

12. How can you do your work with sincerity of heart if you hate your job? What should be your motivation?

13. Do you have a theology of work? What is it? How should a Christian view his/her work?

The Original Worker

We can better understand our work assignment from God by studying the work that He did in creation, when He brought order out of chaos. A gardener does something similar when he creatively uses the materials at his disposal and rearranges them to produce additional resources for mankind. We were created to be stewards of God's creation through our work.

Thus, Adam's work in the garden can be seen as a metaphor for all work. Tim Keller offers the following definition of work: "Rearranging the raw materials of a particular domain to draw out its potential for the flourishing of everyone."

For example, an architect takes steel, wood, concrete, and glass and rearranges them for the flourishing of mankind. A musician rearranges the raw material of sound to produce music. That is what Adam was called to do in the garden, and that is what we are still called to do in our work today.

God's Call to Work

In the opening chapter of Genesis, God gave Adam a job description. It is called the "cultural mandate," also sometimes called the "creation mandate:" "God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Genesis 1:28).

By our work, we employ useful skills to glorify God, love our neighbors, and further God's kingdom.⁵

14. After reading the above, do you look at your work differently? How does this challenge how you have viewed your work in the past?

15. How might your employer look at you differently if you really sought to apply this truth in your workplace?

For Employees:

16. How has this lesson changed your approach to your boss?

17. What is one tangible thing you can do this week to do your job "unto the Lord"?

For Employers:

18. How has this lesson changed your approach to your employees?

19. What tangible thing can you do this week to treat your employees better?

Because of the curse of the fall, work can be difficult, frustrating, and dull. But Christians must understand that work itself is not part of the curse; it was part of God's original plan for humanity. It is an opportunity for us to exercise our creativity, gifts, and interests in order to be effective stewards of God's creation. With a proper understanding of the cultural mandate, Christians can use their work as part of their broader calling as servants of Christ.⁶

⁵Hugh Whelchel, "Seeing God in Your Work," March 28, 2013, <http://www.christianity.com/christian-life/vocation-and-calling/seeing-god-in-your-work.html?p=0>, accessed on 20 March 2015.

⁶Ibid.