

Colossians

chapter 3

3. LIVING IN FREEDOM (3:1 – 4:6)

A. IMPLICATIONS FOR LIVING IN CHRIST (3:1 – 17)



(i) Be heavenly minded (3:1 – 17)

Colossians 3:1

¹Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power.

Setting our sights on heaven helps to bring this present life into right perspective. We really are just "passing through" this life. The prophet Isaiah said our time here was as short as a fading flower (Isaiah 40:6-8). King David said that our time here was as short lived as a shadow (1Chronicles 29:15). By focusing on heaven we are able to navigate through life toward true north by fixing our vision on an immovable, eternal dimension. Before we received our new life in Christ, our life focus finished at the grave, but since experiencing new life in Christ we have a certain hope that our lives will not end at the grave. *We will live for eternity with God in heaven.* If we but stop and consider this it will radically affect our perspective on this present life. Dr. Tony Evans in his book, *What Matters Most*, makes the point that the Negro slaves of the U.S.A. predominantly sang spiritual songs about heaven and their future state rather than singing about their present difficulties. If salvation did nothing other than grace us with a right of passage into heaven, it would be well worth anyone receiving it on that basis alone!

When we consider heaven, we realise that what happens on earth affects heaven. Why is it that Christ has earned the right to sit at the right hand of the Father in the place of honour and power? The reason is because of something that took place on earth.

*¹²And they sang in a mighty chorus:
"The Lamb is worthy—the Lamb who was killed.
He is worthy to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing."
¹³And then I heard every creature in heaven and on
earth and under the earth and in the sea. They
also sang:
"Blessing and honor and glory and power
belong to the one sitting on the throne
and to the Lamb forever and ever."*

Revelation 5:12-13

There is an indivisible connection between heaven and earth. These two realms were the first things that God jointly created. The affairs of earth are controlled by what happens in heaven. Thus, when the Scriptures says that Christ is seated at the right

hand of God in heaven it has a direct bearing on what happens on earth.

Colossians 3:2

²Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth.

Some people have thought that if you are too heavenly minded you are no earthly good. But the problem for most Christians is that they aren't heavenly minded enough! When we consider heaven our thoughts are filled with angels worshiping God continually with sounds and music too wonderful to describe (refer to 2Corinthians 12:4), perfectly peaceful street scenes constructed with priceless materials (Revelation 21:18-21) and, a place where there is no need for sun or moon, night or day, because the glory of the Lord fills all heaven with pure glorious light (Revelation 21:22-23). Thinking about these heavenly thoughts affects how we perceive the Church. If we view the Church as a colony of heaven, which we should, it influences how we minister and carry out our mission. For example, since heaven is filled with exuberant worship, our worship in the church service should likewise be exuberant. Since heaven is constructed with priceless materials we should likewise give God our very best in all we do. When I was a boy, people dressed up to go to church because they wanted to have an attitude that they were giving God their very best. Perhaps as you think about heaven you can find parallels for your life and church as well.

Colossians 3:3

³For you died when Christ died, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

In a way we have already been resurrected to a new life in that we have died to a life of sin and been given new life to live for Christ. When the Father looks at us, He sees His Son, Christ, since we are hidden in Him. Our salvation is not dependent upon anything we can do to earn it, but merely upon our acceptance of God's forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross. Because our lives are hidden with Christ, we now represent Him in everything we do.

Colossians 3:4

⁴And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

This is an amazingly gracious act on the part of God! Not only has He forgiven us but He has qualified us in Christ to partake of the glory of His Son. Awesome! Paul said to the Romans that compared to this glory that we will all share in, any present difficulties are almost meaningless (also refer to 2 Corinthians 4:17).

¹⁸Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later.

Romans 8:18

To the Corinthians Paul revealed that Christians would be resurrected to incredible glory.

⁴³Our bodies now disappoint us, but when they are raised, they will be full of glory. They are weak now, but when they are raised, they will be full of power.

1Corinthians 15:43

There is also a sense here of justice. While the world mistreats and abuses Christians, and in many parts of the world even today the Church is sorely persecuted, this verse reminds us that one day Christ will return and settle all accounts. The Bible says that in that day He will come to judge and take vengeance on all who have made themselves His enemies (2Thessalonians 1:6-10).

(ii) Live differently (3:5 – 11)

Colossians 3:5

⁵So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry.

Since Christ has saved us from sin and has promised a glorious future in heaven to all those who live for Him, we should not continue to live in sin. The New Testament takes the viewpoint that future has already happened, but in the meantime we are obliged to live for today. In this sense, we have already died and been made alive in Christ, but in another sense there is present reality where we actually still have to "die" to the daily temptations to sin. And these temptations are not far away from any of us

since they are *lurking within us*. Therefore, Christians who think they have no need to avoid temptation to sin are fooling themselves. We are all susceptible to heinous sin. The old expression "*there go I but for the grace of God*" is truer than ever for Christians as they mature in Christ.

At the top of the list is *sexual sin*. In a community of brotherly love, the Church, it is still too common for people to overstep the boundaries of brotherly love and fall into over-familiarity and commit sexual sin. This is why Christian marriage is so important. When a Christian marriage is fulfilling and satisfying in every way, the pursuit of illegitimate relationships is diminished greatly. And in typical New Testament fashion, the charge to avoid sexual sin is not just framed in the negative. That is, the Bible doesn't leave us floundering in a lifestyle focussed on avoiding something. In just a few verses, Paul prescribes the remedy for sexual sin by charging husbands and wives to have an increasingly loving relationship.

Sexual sin is also identified as impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Some have justified their adulterous spirit by claiming that they haven't actually committed *the act* of sexual sin. But the Bible doesn't draw such pedantic distinctions. God wants us pure on the inside. Struggling with impure thoughts? Then fill your mind with heavenly thoughts rather than impure ones fuelled by all sorts of temptations such as pornography.

The other main category of sin that Christians are extremely susceptible to is *covetous greed*. Jesus exemplified a simple life. Paul told the Philippians that he had learned to live contentedly (Philippians 4:11). Contentment doesn't always mean going without and putting up with things the way they are. Paul also told the Philippians that he had learned to be content when he had experienced abundance (Philippians 4:12).

In the modern era, covetousness is a prized attribute: "Greed is good", has been the catch cry of many. It is almost a badge of honour among the Western Materialists. At what point though, is enough, enough? Perhaps the answer is: *now*. In other words, be content with what you have *now*. Be *grateful* for what you have now. Learn what it means to live a life not ruled by "things" or possessions.

¹⁵Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own."

Luke 12:15

Contentment is not a matter of living poorly and putting up with it. Contentment is just that, *being content*. It has to do with motives. Some people want more simply so they can impress others with their things. But to be content doesn't mean that we shouldn't necessarily want for more. There are some things that are desirable for us to want.

²⁶*It is good for workers to have an appetite; an empty stomach drives them on.*

Proverbs 16:26

For example, it's reasonable for a young couple to want to have a dwelling place of their own rather than living with parents or in-laws. I really admire those who have a lot but know when enough is enough. These people are also usually very generous. I've noticed that content people are generous with their time, treasure, and talents. If you want to discover greater depths of contentment learn to be more generous.

Colossians 3:6

⁶*God's terrible anger will come upon those who do such things.*

Some people can't comprehend that God gets angry. We need to remember that we are created in the image of God. In other words, we have within us the same emotional range as our Creator. We can be happy because our Creator experiences happiness. We have the capacity to become angry because we are created in the image of our God who can get angry. Just as a parent gets angry at a child who is naughty, yet still loves them, so it is with God. And the reason for God's anger in this instance is when people do things that grieve His heart. This is an aspect of sin that many people don't appreciate. Sin is not merely breaking God's Law; it is also breaking God's heart! Little wonder He is so angered when His children do these things.

We should not foolishly think that immorality or covetousness are excusable matters. They are not. They are extremely serious matters which will reap dire consequences for those committing them.

Colossians 3:7

⁷*You used to do them when your life was still part of this world.*

Forgiveness of sins is not a licence to continue to sin (Romans 6:1-2). The Christian life is a life of constant change. We should have a hatred for sin not a devious entertainment of it. Christians should come out of the world and therefore out of an environment of sinfulness.

Colossians 3:8

⁸But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.

These are the things that are not becoming to the Christian life. Some Christians may excuse their anger or rage as merely a "problem". But the Scriptures here seem to indicate that it is a *sin* not merely a "problem". It also seems that because Paul instructs people to "get rid of" these things that Christians are responsible to learn how to live without anger, rage, malicious behaviour, slander or dirty talk, in their lives. We should not excuse anger and these associated vices. Anger declares a life without peace. It is therefore totally foreign to the Christian life. It is rooted in hate.

Alarmingly, my own research has revealed that most people who have an angry disposition have had a dysfunctional relationship with their father: their own unmet expectations from their fathers causes them to angrily look for a viable replacement to this most vital relationship in their life. The solution is forgiveness. If you feel that anger is a problem in your life, you might consider searching your heart and looking to see how you feel about your father. Do you feel uneasy toward him? Do you love your father? Do you honour your father (birthdays, Fathers' Days, big occasions)? If not, perhaps it's time to do something about it.

Colossians 3:9

⁹Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds.

The previous verse focussed on the way Christians use their tongues, and so does this one. Not only aren't we to express hate with our tongues, but we are not to lie to each other.

It also highlights the Christian's responsibility to accept responsibility for their own growth and development toward maturity, since it is we who are required to *strip off our old natures*.

Paul also makes an interesting distinction between our *evil* natures that naturally tend toward blatant disobedience to God's laws, and our *wicked* deeds which are deeds done against God's Law while knowing full well what we are doing is wrong.

Colossians 3:10

¹⁰In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you.

Christianity is a walk of growth and constant change. Here the New Testament says that we should be constantly renewed. It says that this should happen as we *learn more and more about Christ*. This implies that Christian growth is precipitated by what we *know*. Intellectual stimulation is an important aspect of Christian growth. Jesus said that we are to love the LORD with all our *minds* as well as our hearts and souls (Matthew 22:37). We should not neglect developing our intellectual understanding of God, and then use that to love Him more. While it is true that the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God (1Corinthians 1), we are never told to dismiss our minds.

Sometimes some people are accused of being too intellectual and not spiritual enough because of their thinking. But when you think about it, you can't be *too* intellectual to understand God. The problem is not too much intellect, but not enough(!). No one is smarter than God!

Similarly some people think that if they get more intellectual, they will get less spiritual. This is irrational logic. Some of the greatest minds on the planets have concluded that there must be a God and that He requires our utter devotion. Men such as Johann S. Bach, Sir Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, are just a small sample of such men. Truly intelligent minds acknowledge that something may be true even if they don't understand it. We don't have to always understand something in order for us to *know* that it is true. I doubt that too many people living in Hiroshima in 1945 *understood* atomic energy, but they knew that it was true!

What we come to know about Christ causes us to grow spiritually. At Legana, we value the anointed teaching of God's Word as the *primary catalyst* for change in a believer's life. Therefore, it is imperative that we develop our *minds* and especially do this with

our knowledge of Christ so that we can grow spiritually (which you are now doing by reading this).

Colossians 3:11

¹¹In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

There are some Christians who hold to a *Dispensational Theology* (perhaps without even realising it), who don't fully believe this verse. As a boy growing up in a Pentecostal church, which held to Dispensational Theology, I was taught to believe that Gentile Christians were less blessed than Jews, or Jewish Christians. Not until many years later when I realised the error (actually the heresy) of this theology, did I realise that God only has one people: *His Church*. Previously I had been taught and believed that the Church was an interim agenda for God until Christ raptured it from off the face of the earth so that He could reinstate His original agenda with Israel. But then I saw that the Scriptures do not teach this. They teach that God put an end to the Old Covenant, including its link to Israel, and established a New Covenant that does not discriminate against the nationality of anyone.

This verse is extremely clear that God makes no distinction in regard to nationality or racial background. Christ is the Great Leveller. He makes everyone equal in Him. Several centuries ago as Western Christianity expanded into the "Two-Thirds World", it often spread unwittingly with an underlying racism. These missionaries went out with a paradigm that British Culture was the only acceptable culture (by the way, I am the son of a Brit!). Western Christians have a lot to learn from Christians of other cultures.

(iii) Live in love for others (3:12 – 15)

Colossians 3:12

¹²Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Christianity is thoroughly founded in love and compassion. God so *loved* the world that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ. When Christ ministered on earth, He ministered out of compassion for people. He filled us with His love when He saved us. We are now able to love even our enemies (Matthew 5:44; Romans 13:9-10) because of the 'heart transplant' that we have received (refer to Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27).

Paul's reasoning for believers to live differently is based on God's call for us to be holy. Being holy means to be separate, different, and special. In Christianity there are no common believers and then "holy" believers. Under the Older Covenant, God expressed His love specifically toward Israel and required them to be holy because they were the objects of His love.

*¹⁵Yet the LORD chose your ancestors as the objects of his love. And he chose you, their descendants, above every other nation, as is evident today.
¹⁶Therefore, cleanse your sinful hearts and stop being stubborn.*

Deuteronomy 10:15-16

Under the New Covenant we are all holy. God also loves us *all*. We are therefore objects of God's tenderhearted mercy, His kindness, His humiliation, gentleness, and patience. Consequently, we should "be clothed" with these attributes as well. Many Christians are concerned about having others take advantage of them because they live out these attributes. But this is no reason for dismissing these attributes to grow in our lives. As far as being taken advantage of by unscrupulous people, we can rest assured that this will probably happen quite often, just as these same people also take advantage of God's tender-hearted kindness towards them as well.

Colossians 3:13

¹³You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

What a great dynamic this verse contains for building a strong local church. Churches that grow strong and increase in influence are churches that put this verse into practice. We are a forgiven people who need to continually forgive others- even our own brothers and sisters in Christ who may occasionally offend us! In church life we are often shocked to discover other people's

misgivings and character shortfalls. I've seen people come into our own church with very idealistic concepts about "the church" only to have those expectations shattered on the rocks of reality. These people usually have a story to tell of how their last church "hurt" them. They can describe how their last pastor was so neglectful of them, and how the people in their last church treated them so unfairly. Their stories only amplify their lack of understanding about the reality of church life. They often have high expectations for others that not even they themselves can attain to, and their claims of being hurt by a church only serves to loudly demonstrate how they have refused to apply this particular verse in their lives.

Perhaps you have experienced "hurt" by another person or church. You can know "healing" from your pain if you simply apply this verse and forgive those who have wronged you. You can then immunise yourself against future hurt by learning how to continually apply this verse. You need to bring the bar of your expectations down closer to where the bar of reality actually is. The motivation for living this way is based on what the Lord has done for us. If we believe that the LORD has done this for us, we should do this for others.

¹⁴"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 6:14-15

Colossians 3:14

¹⁴And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.

Paul told the Ephesians to be clothed in spiritual armour (Ephesians 6:12ff). Their issue was a lack of understanding into the unity that Christ had achieved between Jew and Gentile to bring them together into the Body of Christ. They were especially susceptible to demonic attacks that sought to divide them. Thus, they were advised to be clothed in spiritual armour to be able to withstand these attacks.

The Colossians however faced a different menace. For them the threat of division came from within, rather than from the outside. While they were being subjected to the heresies of the Gnostics and Judaizers, they appear to have sustained their unity

throughout this. But to maintain this unity from any threat within their congregation they would have to be clothed in love. This kind of love tolerates other people's faults. This kind of love sows the seeds of harmony. This kind of harmony is described as "perfect" harmony by Paul. Therefore to be a church with *perfect* harmony is to be a church with many faults, many shortcomings, many disagreements and small conflicts, but where all of these things are overlooked and forgiven because of the love that exists between everyone. To be a perfect church, by this standard, is to be a church where there is love fostering deep harmony.

Colossians 3:15

¹⁵And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

While we tolerate people with faults and shortcomings we are also aware of our own (and how these must irritate others). We are told here that we must let the peace of Christ rule our hearts. In other words we don't try to create a conflict or prolong a dispute with another member of the Body of Christ. Neither do we walk away from an issue with another believer, by leaving a church and claiming that we have yet again been hurt by another church. This does not produce peace; rather it causes anxiety and tension to fester.

To truly develop peace we are told to be thankful for our brothers and sisters. The context of this statement seems to suggest that focussing on the positive attributes of other believers and being thankful for them, rather than fussing on their niggling negatives achieves this level of peace within the local church.

(iv) Speak differently (3:16 – 17)

Colossians 3:16

¹⁶Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.

I once heard a preacher suggest that Christians should be perpetually including the Gospels in their daily readings of the Scriptures. If we are to take this verse seriously, then that particular preacher's suggestion may not be a bad idea. Christians should continually refresh their minds with the words of Christ by reading the Gospel accounts of Christ's teachings.

Paul says here that the teaching of Christ will (i) make the believer wise, and (ii) enable the believer to teach and counsel other believers. In recent years counselling has become a boom industry. This trend has caused many people to expect the Church to offer similar services to its members. But there is a notable difference between secular counselling and Christian counselling. This verse clearly identifies that difference: *the place of the Scriptures*. Christian counselling is very directive and based entirely on the Scriptures. Secular counselling while often drawing on the principles of the Bible also uses quite subjective psychological techniques. But the need for this modern version of counselling has increased because of the lack of Biblical literacy among most Western believers.

Singing is an integral part of Christian worship and *discipleship*. When we worship God with singing, we actually get closer to God and thus fuel our own discipleship growth. The Psalms repeatedly tell us to worship God with our praise songs.

*⁴Sing to the LORD, all you godly ones!
Praise his holy name.*

Psalm 30:4

*¹Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song.
Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.*

Psalm 96:1

Psalms are really poetic prayers. They were originally written with the intention that they would be sung. Although they were written thousands of years ago, their cries to God are still powerfully relevant to us today. Paul says we should sing the Psalms. When we read the Psalms themselves, they instruct us that we should sing them accompanied by various musical instruments. They also instruct us that we should be innovative with our singing of praises by singing *new songs* to God.

*³Sing new songs of praise to him;
play skillfully on the harp and sing with joy.*

Psalm 33:3

*¹Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song.
Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.*

Psalm 149:1

Since the Psalms themselves instruct us to sing new songs to God it is not surprising that Paul also says that we should sing *hymns* and *spiritual songs*. As the church meets to worship God with congregational singing, there should be a continual stream of fresh songs that reflect what the Bible instructs us to do. While some churches take pride in the fact that they still sing the hymns that were written hundreds of years ago, this is actually contrary to what the Bible clearly tells us to do.

Colossians 3:17

¹⁷And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father.

Our worship and devotion to the Scriptures should be supported by the way we live and talk outside the church. We should always be living as representatives of Jesus to the world. No matter what we have or don't have; no matter what we achieve or don't achieve, we should be thankful. Someone once said that if you can look back over each day and find five things to be thankful for it will gradually change your entire outlook on life. Christians should not be gaining reputations as moaners and complainers! We can be genuinely thankful *in*, not necessarily *for*, every circumstance.

B. IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES (3:18 – 21)

(i) Husbands and wives (3:18 – 19)

Colossians 3:18

¹⁸You wives must submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.

This is a rather unconditional verse for wives. It does not say, as some have taught, that you only submit to a husband worthy of your submission. We see the New Testament's reasoning for this more clearly in Ephesians 5 (refer to my commentary on this passage) where Paul states that the marriage relationship is a picture of the relationship that Christ has with His Church. In that scenario, where Christ is the Head of the Church, the Church is required to fully submit to Him. In the same way, marriage reflects



this union and it is therefore required that a wife submit to her husband in the same way. Naturally this places the husband in a great position of responsibility and privilege. He *should be* worthy of his wife's submission.

Colossians 3:19

¹⁹And you husbands must love your wives and never treat them harshly.

This verse tells husbands how they can *at least* be worthy of their wife's submission: *love her and treat her graciously*. From my research of women, they tell me that they *want* their husbands to take the lead. They would willingly submit to a husband who was considerate, and generous with his heart and time toward them. Husbands can do a lot to earn the respect and submission of their wives by being diligent around the house (alleviating, not creating, work for their wives, like, keeping things clean and orderly around the house).

It goes without saying that husbands should never hit or physically harm their wives in any way. Christian women enjoy tremendous respect and admiration from their husbands. They are treated as equals, rather than subservient-midians. The same cannot be said of many other religions, which seem to endorse the concept that women are most naturally inferior to men. We now take for granted much of what the New Testament says about the equality of women with men. But I doubt that we Westerners can really imagine what it must have been like for women during the first century and how incredibly radical this teaching must have been for the first century readers.

(ii) Parents and children (3:20 – 21)

Colossians 3:20

²⁰You children must always obey your parents, for this is what pleases the Lord.

The relationship between a child and their parent is one that shapes the child's future adult life like no other relationship they could ever have. It is critical for children to honour and obey their parents. Again, just as a wife's submission to her husband places an onus of responsibility on a husband, so to does his children's obedience place a further onus of responsibility on a father. Yet despite this expectation of fatherly diligence perhaps not being met, it pleases the Lord when children honour their parents. Obviously children should not be encouraged to remain in households where there is any form of harmful abuse.

Colossians 3:21

²¹Fathers, don't aggravate your children. If you do, they will become discouraged and quit trying.



Here is where fathers need God's wisdom to know how to best discipline their children without causing them to lose heart. Fathers who only ever speak to their children when they correct them, are not adequately reflecting the father heart of God. Fathering needs to be consistent. It demands that a child receive an appropriate balance of love and limits. This topic is covered in our video teaching series *Inoculating Against Relationship Germs* (available from LEGANAMEDIA www.legana.org). Too many Christian children have quit while trying to attain the almost impossible standards laid down by over-strict fathers. This verse warns fathers in particular that their firmness must be tempered with a good deal of fairness.

C. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE (3:22 – 4:1)

(i) How to work (3:22 – 25)

Colossians 3:22

²²You slaves must obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Obey them willingly because of your reverent fear of the Lord.

Living for Christ has implications for every aspect of our daily lives. Paul has just briefly shared some of those implications for family relationships. Now he shares how living for Christ should affect the way we conduct ourselves in the marketplace.

This verse does not condone slavery; it merely Christianises an existing cultural practice. Just as women were poorly treated under the cultural practices of the day in the first century, so too were slaves. This verse gave slaves dignity. We know that many, many slaves became Christians in the first century. In fact, one of the first century's most influential churches was located in the then world centre for slave trading: Antioch. This church presumably also had many slaves in it. The way the New Testament treats this kind of slavery is very typical of how it employs the principle of *being thankful in all circumstances, rather than thankful for all circumstances*.

The New Testament tells slaves to serve their masters willingly and diligently. They are instructed to serve their masters because that is right. And doing what is right is Christian. Therefore it says that Christian slaves should serve their masters because of this principle and their fear of the Lord.

Colossians 3:23

²³Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.

It would be easy to imagine how poorly a first century master would have treated their slaves. It would likewise be easy to

understand that slaves would be less than keen to give their masters their heartfelt devotion. But Paul introduces a life principle for slaves that applies to all aspects of the Christian life: *whatever you do, do as if you were doing it for the Lord.*

We can see how this principle easily transfers into the employer-employee relationship. Christian workers are not just to work when their bosses are looking, or if their bosses are fair to them or not. These principles are not easy to live out, but they are made easier by truly appreciating that a Christian works for the Lord, not a human boss.

Colossians 3:24

²⁴Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and the Master you are serving is Christ.

It is spiritually criminal to consider that whatever we do in life is really insignificant. This is profoundly untrue. It doesn't matter whether you pump petrol at a petrol station, or chair a multi-national conglomerate, whatever you do is significant. This verse says that we will all actually receive remuneration from our Heavenly Paymaster. Our remuneration is referred to here as our "inheritance". This was a key word in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, which the Colossians would eventually get to read as well.

Colossians 3:25

²⁵But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites who can get away with evil.

The Bible is not afraid to occasionally employ negatives, such as dire warnings, to strongly discourage people from disobeying its commands. And this is a very dire warning indeed. The fact that it says that God has no favourites in this context actually warns Christians that we too are subject to God's scrutinising judgment.