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## INTRODUCTION

1. Image: I heard it described that our life is like a house of rooms.
2. Need: We all engage in work.
3. Subject: How does the gospel affect the way we work?
4. Text: Col 3:22-4:1
  - a. It was awkward for the Colossian church
  - b. It is awkward for us
5. Preview: What are two things we work for? What do we work under?

## BODY

- I. Believers work for the king's pleasure (3:22-23)
  - A. Paul teaches the Colossians to work to please God not man (3:22-23)
    1. Paul teaches the Colossians to avoid working for man (3:22)
      - a. We do our work whether or bosses watches us or not ("*not by the way eye service*")
      - b. We work not curry favor with our bosses ("*not as people pleasers*")
      - c. Illustration: It reminds me of a co-worker I had.
        - i. What would your boss find you doing if he came into your office?
        - ii. Would he find you eating when you're not supposed to?
    2. We experience anxiety when we work to please others.
      - a. When will my boss come by?
      - b. You take on more assignments than you should.
      - c. You consider taking shortcuts at work.
    3. Paul teaches the Colossians to work to please God (3:22-23)
      - a. Work with sincerity of heart (3:22; 23)
        - i. "*sincerity of heart*" (3:22)
        - ii. "*work heartily*" (3:23)
      - b. Work with reverence for God (3:22)
  - B. When we work to please God, it frees us from the need to please others at work.
  - C. Feel God's pleasure when you work.
    - a. "God made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure."
    - b. God made you to do your work.
- II. Believers work for the king's reward (3:24-25)
  - A. When we work for compensation we experience longing for more.
    1. Discontent drives our desire for higher compensation.
    2. Compensation can only do so much.
      - a. It can't buy you lost time with your family.
      - b. It can't buy the respect of colleagues.
      - c. It can't buy your more time on the earth.

- B. Paul teaches the Colossians about God's system of compensation (3:24-25)
  - 1. Slaves in the Roman empire received no compensation nor an inheritance from their masters.
  - 2. The faithful worker will receive a reward (3:24)
  - 3. The unfaithful worker will receive judgment (3:25)
    - a. Recall how Onesimus done wrong by running away from Philemon
    - b. We should expect to receive discipline if we fail to perform in our work places
    - c. We may experience God's judgment at Christ's return.
      - i. It doesn't seem fair.
      - ii. We forget that we will spend eternity with Christ.
      - iii. Final judgment is like a graduation.
- C. What we have received already in Christ is more than we can imagine.
- D. Anticipate the reward you will receive from Christ at his return for faithfulness at work.
  - 1. Anticipate the reward when you receive your pay check.
  - 2. Anticipate your reward when you receive your grade
  - 3. Anticipate your reward when you receive a note from a child.
- III. Believers work under the king's authority (4:1)
  - A. We will never be the final authority
    - 1. Think about your company.
      - a. Supervisors have managers.
      - b. Managers have directors
      - c. Directors have a board
      - d. The board has its shareholders.
    - 2. Think about school.
      - a. Students have professors
      - b. Teachers report to the department head.
      - c. The department head reports to the principle
      - d. The principle reports to the district and etc.
  - B. Paul teaches the Colossians that God is the ultimate master (4:1).
    - 1. Masters do not have unlimited authority.
    - 2. Think about how this might have affected the Colossian church.
  - C. We may not be very high on the organization chart, but we exercise influence.
  - D. We have a master who became a servant.

## CONCLUSION

- 1. Summary: Believers work for the king's approval. Believers work for the king's reward. Believers work under the king's authority.
- 2. Closing Image: For when God's kingdom lifts off may we hear the words: "Well done good and faithful servant"

MANUSCRIPT

**I heard it described that our life is like a house of rooms.** Each of the rooms represent one aspect of our lives. One room represents our family. Another room represents our friendships. Another room represents our church community. One room represents our interests. One room represents our spirituality. One room represents our work.

When we become a believer in Christ, we think that our relationship with God takes up residence in the room of spirituality. All other rooms remain off limits to the Holy Spirit. As we grow in our faith, we open up each of these rooms and allow the Holy Spirit to enter.

But C.S. Lewis presents a different idea. Instead of thinking of God as a guest you allow to enter into different rooms to tidy up, you should think of God as the ultimate fixer upper. Instead of Chip and Joanne Gaines, you have the Holy Spirit with tool belt and hard hat ready to tear down nearly everything and reconstruct it. He wants to transform every element of your life.

Last week, we talked about how the gospel transforms family relationships: Husband to wife, wife to husband, parent to child, and child to parent. This week we turn our attention to work.

**We all engage in work.** (Might want to edit it to most of us engage in work) When think of work, we think of a paid job. We think of the engineer, who goes into the office and designs a new way to search for new oil under the crust of the earth. We think of a doctor who goes into the hospital or clinic to see patients every day. We think of the lawyer who goes into his or her company to help them sort out some complicated legal contract. We think of those who sit behind a computer to write new code to figure out how to manage a database more efficiently.

We think of the teacher who goes into the classroom to teach kids. At the end of the day, all these people receive payment for their work. But there is unpaid work.

For students, you spend your days attending class, hearing lectures, completing assignments, taking exams. Some of you stay at home to take care of a child. This means playing with the child, putting the child down for a nap, talking with the child, and feeding the child. When the child sleeps, you take care of the things around the house: paying the bills, balancing the checkbook, cleaning the bathroom, vacuuming the floors, cleaning the dishes, or putting away the toys.

We spend a lot of time working. It takes up almost 40% of our time in the week if we work a forty-hour work week with an hour allowed for commute for each day. Some of you spend even more time than that. We spend more time with our co-workers than with our families. We speak with co-workers more than we do our friends.

Since we spend so much time at work, as believers we ought to ask ourselves: **How does the gospel affect our work?** How does faith in Christ change the way we work? How does the Spirit transform the way we conduct our work? **How does the gospel affect our work?**

To answer this question, we'll turn to Colossians, chapter three. Colossians, chapter three which Yvette just read for us. This is an awkward passage because Paul talks about the slavery. It's not just awkward for us, but it was also awkward for the Colossian church.

Tychicus walks into the Sunday worship service at Philemon's house. He shares that he has this letter from the apostle Paul. Everyone at the Colossian church had heard about Paul, but they never thought that they would pen them a letter. Tychicus unfurls the scroll. But before he begins to read, he gestures to the door. Someone peeps in. The gathering looks.

Tychicus then says through the side of his mouth: "Get in here." Lo and behold, it's Onesimus. He takes a seat. But the room is abuzz. Onesimus was a slave. Philemon owned Onesimus. But Onesimus ran away and now sat with his owner: Philemon in Philemon's house amongst the believers. Philemon could have taken him out the authorities to have Onesimus punished. But he decides to wait. Tychicus reads the letter of Colossians. Talk about an awkward situation.

It's awkward for us because slavery is a moral failure in American History. Whenever we read about slavery in the Bible, it's difficult for us to not react with revulsion. But I'd like us to consider a few things concerning slavery in the Bible. First, Paul does not condone slavery. Passages such as the one found here and in other letters such as 1 Corinthians and Philemon serve as the basis for Christians to work to abolish slavery. Second, Paul recognizes that slavery was a socio-economic reality of the Roman empire. Almost a third of those living in the Roman empire were slaves. Most households like Philemon would have owned at least one slave. Third, how a person became a slave were vast. For instance, some people sold themselves into slavery in order to pay off debt. This is also known as indentured servitude. Most slaves would be able to purchase their freedom after serving for a time. Despite the differences, it didn't make being slave easy. The ESV uses the word: bondservant rather than slave because I think that the translators who did the 2011 text believe that the slaves in view here are indentured servants. The older text versions of the ESV used the term: slave.

While none of us are slaves, some of us may have experienced something similar to indentured servitude. For instance, if your company pays for a certification exam, then you're required to work for them for a minimum of three years before you can seek employment elsewhere. Your company may pay for graduate school, but you have to work with them for a

certain amount of years after you complete the degree. I've heard of some of my lawyer friends working long hours, so that they can become a partner at their firms. Some of you have described a medical residency as "slave" labor because you work long hours for little pay. While we may not be slaves, the principles that Paul outlines here still apply to us in our work.

This morning we'll discuss two questions: **First, what are two things we work for? Second, what do we work under? What are two things we work for? What do we work under?**

First question, what do we work for? **Believers work for the king's pleasure.** We work to please God. We work for God's delight. We do our work to please God. Believers work for the king's pleasure.

**Paul teaches the Colossians to work to please God not man.** We have one ultimate boss: God and he is the one we should please. It's not to say that we should not seek to please our bosses, but we need to remember that we work for an even greater authority.

First, **Paul teaches the Colossians to avoid working for man.** Look with me at verse 22: *"Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers."* Let's think a little bit more about the two phrases: eye-service and people pleasers.

What does Paul mean: "not by the way of eye-service"? **We do our work whether our boss watches us or not.** Whenever we are given an assignment, we don't wait until our boss or our supervisor is watching us to carry it out. Even when we are not watched, we carry out our work. The presence of our boss motivates us to work because we want to be seen as diligent. When they take off, we're tempted to slack off because no one is watching.

This leads us to the second phrase: “people pleasers”. The NIV renders the phrase: “curry favor.” **We work not to curry favor with your bosses.** If we work only when our boss is present, then our work is superficial. We just do enough work to get by because we want to make sure that our boss is pleased. We all have co-workers do less whenever the boss is on vacation. Some are even difficult to reach when the boss is away. When the boss returns, they seem to increase in productivity by 100%.

It reminds me of a co-worker I had. When I worked at an aerospace firm, my team got work around 6:30am. My entire team would begin work checking our emails and project queue. If you wanted to eat breakfast at work, then you would have to come in earlier to eat and start work at 6:30am. All my other co-workers did this except one. He would come into the office at 6:30am. He would set out his bowl and cereal and then proceed to cut up a banana. The reason why he ate breakfast at 6:30am rather than earlier is because he knew that our boss’s office was a fifteen-minute walk from office. Our boss would never walk in on him having his morning chow.

One morning, my co-worker did his usual breakfast routine. As he was about to place a spoonful of cereal into his mouth, my boss rounds the corner. My co-worker’s eyes were as big as saucers. My boss then asks: “Am I interrupting?” Let’s just say it was an embarrassing situation. What would your boss find you doing if he came into your office? Would he find you eating when you’re not supposed to? Or would he find you browsing your newsfeed?

What happens when we work too please others? We experience anxiety. **We experience anxiety when we work to please others.** If you’re always thinking: “When will my

boss come by?” You’ll always find yourself covering for unproductive behavior. You’re always looking over your shoulder.

If you work to please others, you may desire your boss and teammates to view you as competent. This leads you take on more assignments than you should. When deadlines start to pile up and your stress levels increase.

You don’t like saying: “No” to people and it causes you to consider short cuts. Someone from another department says: “We need to ship this component out today. The customer needs it ASAP” You know that before the component gets shipped out, it needs a signature from the quality engineer. This could another day. If you feel need to please people, then it puts you in a stressful situation. You may either bypass the process or displease someone.

What does Paul teach? **Paul teaches the Colossians to work to please God.** Paul teaches that a bondservant should work for God rather than their masters. We should work to honor God rather seek the approval of our bosses or co-workers.

Paul gives the command in verse 22: *“obey in everything those who are your earthly masters.”* As long as your assignment does not cause you to violate your company policies, the law, your conscience, or your faith then you should do it. When your boss gives you an assignment, carry out. This is why he says in verse 23: *“whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for man”*. We should not work solely for the pleasure for people.

Paul gives two ways for us to please God when we carry out our assignments. First, **work with sincerity of heart.** Work with sincerity of heart. We see this phrase in verse 22. Paul repeats this idea in verse 23, when he says: *“work heartily”*. The word sincerity carries with it the idea of a singleness of mind. You have a laser focus. When you’re given an assignment, you

ask: "When is the deadline?" You get it done. You don't grumble. You don't complain. You do your best to meet the deadline set. If you can't meet it then you ask for an extension.

Second, **work with reverence for God**. We see the phrase: "*fearing the Lord*." This doesn't mean that you tremble and think about what God will do to you if you slack off. Instead, you revere God because he has give you your work as a means of loving your neighbor. As a doctor, you praise God for how he has made medicine and procedures to alleviate the pain and suffering of others. You praise God for how he created the laws of physics and mathematics to map terrain under the earth. You are in awe of how God has created your students when attentive to learn quickly. You see how God has equipped you to help others through work.

**When we work to please God, it frees us from the need to please others at work.**

When we're left alone to work on assignments, we know that God is watching us. He cares about how we do our work. When we feel the pressure to take on more work so that we seem more competent, we feel the freedom to say: "No" because God is pleased with me. I don't need to approval of others. God approves of me because of what Christ has done for me on the cross. When we feel the pressure to take a shortcut at work, we can tell our co-workers: "Sorry, we have to follow the process." Although no one may know that you released a part to be sent to a customer without a signature from quality, God would know. You're accountable to him. For you know that the policies are in place to protect others from harm and to preserve your company's integrity.

**Feel God's pleasure when you work.** There's a line in an old film about the Olympic runner: Eric Liddell. In the film he comments: "God made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure." God made you to do your work. It could be as a student. He gave you the scores to

get into university. He gave you certain aptitudes or interests. He gave you the diligence necessary to get assignments done. It could be as an engineer. A doctor. A lawyer. A teacher. Whatever you do, God has created you specifically for skills for this task. When you work on an assignment or project, know that God is delighted because you are doing what he made you to do.

What is the second thing that believers work for? **Believers work for the king's reward** (3:24-25). The Lord will reward you for your work. You seek out his reward and not just the paycheck at the end of a pay cycle. **Believers work for the king's reward.**

What happens when we just work for a salary? What if we just work for a certain figure? **When we work for compensation we experience longing for more.** Discontent drives our desire for higher compensation. A six-figure salary affords you a life style that a five-figure salary may not. You may want that bigger house. You may want the newest muscle car. You may want the newest phone. You'll be able to go on vacation to an exotic land. You may be able to buy that fishing boat. But there will always be a bigger house, a faster car, a newer gadget, a more exotic land, and better fishing boat.

**Compensation can only do so much.** If you work long hours to get that next promotion, then it can't buy you lost time with your family. If you have to take credit for other people's work in order to be recognized and get a year-end bonus, it can't buy the respect of colleagues. Even if you have all the money on the earth and you get terminally ill, you may be able to purchase more effective treatments. But your time on the earth is limited. Money can't buy your more time on the earth.

This does not mean you should not seek out fair compensation. If you work, then you should receive a fair wage. If you work long hours, then it would be right for a company to compensate you. But if you believe that compensation will satisfy your deepest longings and desires, then that will get you into trouble. For only God can satisfy those longings through Christ.

**Paul teaches the Colossians about God's system of compensation (3:24-25). Why?**

Slaves in the Roman empire received no inheritance from their masters. Although their masters may not compensate them well, God will compensate them. Likewise, God will compensate us no matter the amount we're paid for a job well done. Paul talks about two types of workers.

First, **the faithful worker will receive a reward.** Look with me at verse 24: *"knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord"* What is this inheritance? In some sense, we have received a part of this inheritance in part when we placed our faith in Christ. When we place our faith in Christ, we experience an intimate relationship with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We experience the forgiveness of our sins. We experience the inclusion into a new community under the headship of Christ, the church. But there is also a sense that there is something yet for us to experience. When Jesus returns, we will receive some form of a reward. The reward may be one of two things. One, the reward could be Christ rewards us with an even deeper intimacy with him. Second, Christ rewards us with responsibility in his heavenly kingdom.

Second, **the unfaithful worker will receive judgment.** Verse 25 says: *"For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality."*

Recall how Onesimus had done wrong by running away from Philemon. The reasons for his escape are unknown. Although Paul writes on Onesimus's behalf in the letter to Philemon asking him to accept Onesimus back as a brother in Christ, he warns the other slaves in the community not to rebel against their masters. Otherwise, their masters would be just in disciplining them.

**Likewise, we should expect discipline when we fail to perform in our work places.** If we fail to study for an exam, then we should expect to receive a poor grade. If we make a promise to deliver a product on a deadline, but fail to do so then we should expect our boss to be disappointed. This could result in a poor performance review. If we fail to teach our students well, then the parents make an appointment to share their complaints.

**Not only do we receive discipline now, but we may experience judgment at Christ's return.** We believe as Christians that there will come a final judgment. On that final judgment, Christ will separate the nonbeliever from believer. But then, there is a second judgment where Christ will judge a believer according to his or her faithfulness and compensate them accordingly. This verse indicates that if we are unfaithful in our work, then we will receive a loss of reward. This does not mean that we will lose our salvation. But it does mean that we will either experience a lesser intimacy with God or given less responsibility in God's kingdom. The way you work will have an effect on the reward you will receive.

From an earthly perspective, it doesn't seem fair. For someone who has more seems to get the better deal. The one who has less seemed to get the poorer deal. But if you think about it, how much intimacy with God we receive or responsibility in the kingdom we receive matters

little. We will spend eternity with God. God will hold our attention so much so that we will not compare ourselves to others.

I've heard the final judgment described like a graduation. Some people complete the graduation requirements with high marks. Some people complete the graduation requirements just barely. On graduation day, some people receive degrees with magna cum laude or summa cum laude. Although some people may receive degrees with varying distinctions, everyone is glad that they graduated.

**What we have received already in Christ is more than we can imagine.** We have received the forgiveness of sins. We have a citizenship in heaven. We have been freed from the law. We have been freed from the dominion of sin. We are at peace with God. We are loved by God. We are spiritually alive. If everything that we have is taken away from us, then would we be able to say: The riches we have in Christ is enough. Yet God intends to reward us at Christ's return with a resurrected body like his and also to rule with him in his kingdom.

**Anticipate the reward you will receive from Christ at his return for faithfulness at work.** How can we remind ourselves to anticipate the reward we will receive in Christ? Every time you receive a paycheck either a physical one or a notification that that you have been paid, remember the reward that you will receive in heaven. When you receive a grade for an assignment or exam, remember the reward that you will receive in Christ. When you receive a note from your child saying: "Best mom ever!" or "Best dad ever!", anticipate your reward in Christ.

Let's move on to the last question. What do we work under? **Believers work under the king's authority** (4:1). We work under the oversight of God. God oversees our work. He delegates authority to us. **Believers work under the king's authority.**

If you think about it, **we will never be the final authority.** Think about your company. Your supervisor has a manager. Her manager has a director. The director reports to the board. There may be a head of the board, the CEO. The board has responsibility to its shareholder and to its customers. Think about school. Students have teachers. Teachers report to the department head. The department head reports to the principals. The principal reports to the district. Doctors are responsible for maintaining policies set by a medical board. Lawyers are responsible to a bar association.

**Paul teaches the Colossians about God is the ultimate master.** Look with me at chapter 4, verse 1. It says: *"Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly knowing that you have also have a Master in Heaven."* Paul reminds the masters at Colossae that they do not have unlimited authority to do whatever they want to their slaves. There are limits to what they can do. For God is watching them. Masters should not treat a slave preferentially over another. Instead each slave ought to receive fair treatment and compensation in the form of money, clothing, and housing. After all, both master and slave have equal status before God.

**Think about how this might have affected the Colossian church.** As Philemon heard this letter read for the first time, I'm sure that he was nodding with hearty assent to verse 22: "Obey in everything your earthly masters" He may have said: "Amen! Preach it!" If he was a note taker he may have written it down in capital letters because Onesimus had disobeyed. Philemon also enjoyed verse 23: *"For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has*

*done, for there is no partiality.*” Maybe he thought about what kind of discipline he was going to carry out against Onesimus. But then Tychicus reads chapter 4, verse 1. This may have caused Philemon to pause. He may have even asked: “Can you read that again?” This would mean that Philemon couldn’t just do whatever he wanted to Onesimus. It would have to be fair and equitable treatment. If you want to find out more about what happens to Philemon and Onesimus, then read the letter of Philemon.

What does that mean for us? I mean not all of us are bosses. We don’t have people reporting to us. When I look at the organization chart, I’m at the very bottom of the chart. No matter where you are in the organization chart, you exercise influence. How do you work with your co-workers? Do you treat each of them fairly? Or do you have preferential treatment to others? When you attend class, I’m sure that there are people that you find easier to hang out. But if a classmate asks you for help, do you dismiss them because they’re not part of your friend group, or do you offer your help?

For those of you who are in positions of authority either as a TA, teacher, professor, attending physician, employer, or supervisor, how do you use your authority? Do you use your authority to lord it over people? Or do you treat all those under you fairly?

Why do we treat those under us with fairness and justice? We have a master who became a servant. For Jesus Christ, who is the firstborn of creation, made himself nothing by being born in the likeness of man. The one who created all things was born as an infant and depended on a mother to nurse him, change him, and cuddle him. He who created words could only cry out in unintelligible words to ask for help. He took the form of a servant ultimately to

die a cross for our sins. If our God took the form of a servant, then we should use our authority to treat others fairly.

Not only does Jesus set an example for us to imitate, but all of us will be called to give an account. When we face Christ at the throne of judgment, we will need to give an account for what we have done. One aspect of that accounting will be: How have we treated those under us? Have we treated them with preference? Or did we treat them equitably and fairly?

Let's review once more how the gospel affects the way believer work? First, **believers work for the king's approval.** Second, **believers work for the king's reward.** Lastly, **believers work under the king's authority.**

A pastor once conducted a funeral service for a man who helped to develop the Boeing 747. After the service, he spoke with the wife and commented how remarkable it was that her husband had helped to build this aircraft that helped make international travel commonplace.

She replied: "The truth is, he worked on one little switchbox smaller than a loaf of bread. That's all he worked on for 15 years. But when that 747 lifted off the ground for the first time, it was the happiest day of his life."

This man worked on a switchbox for more than a decade. But without it, the Boeing 747 may have never taken off. Sometimes, we look at the small effort we make at work isn't very important. At those times, may we remember that we work for God. For when God's kingdom lifts off may we hear the words: "Well done good and faithful servant"