

**"Gospel-Driven Work"
(Colossians 3:22-4:1)
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Core Issue: The gospel reminds us that, as God's children, we are called to work for the Lord in all circumstances. Knowing who we work for greatly impacts how we work on a daily basis.

Opposing Value: We are often tempted to compartmentalize our faith from work. This leads to a distorted view of work which leaves us with frustration, meaninglessness, and emptiness. As a result, many of us find ourselves idolizing work or being idle at work.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. Today we'll be taking a break from our series on the gospel of John and will look at one important aspect of our lives that inevitably will be transformed through our relationship with Christ, namely **work**.

No one will deny the fact that work is a huge part of all of our lives. **Pastor David Platt** said this about work: "If people work 40 hours a week for 40 years of their lives, that means they'll put in more than 80,000 hours at a job during their lifetime. And these hours don't even include the thousands they spend in school preparing for work; on top of thousands more they spend in their transportation. Not only that, if you're like most people, you also spend quite a lot of time thinking about your job." We ask questions about what we need to *do* or the *meaning* of work. Clearly, a lot of hours go into our work. In addition, thanks to the advancement of technology, we can work anywhere and anytime. We can do our work at home, at a coffee shop, in a cubicle of a corporate office, at a desk in a classroom, at a park, or at a beach. We are no longer bound by place or time to get things done. This can be, of course, a good thing but this could also impact us negatively. There is no doubt that work is consuming a huge chunk of our lives every day. But that's not all. **Our work not only consumes us but it also shapes us.** Our identity gets wrapped around our work. We find our value and significance in what we do – and we feel insecure when we don't work or work at a place we may not feel proud of. If our work plays such a huge role in our lives, I think it's important for us to ask, "How much of our relationship with Christ is impacting our work?"

Recently I came across a podcast called, “*Minister with Monday in mind*” by **Pastor Tom Nelson**. This podcast addressed the reality of many gospel-centered churches failing to connect Sunday worship to Monday work for their members. He said, “Many who are Christians complain of a ‘Sunday-Monday gap,’ where their Sunday worship hour bears little to no relevance to the issues they face in their Monday workplace hours.” Does this describe you today? The truth is that many of us do feel this disconnect. This happens because some of us genuinely don’t know how to connect our faith to our daily lives; but some of us do know and even understand its importance yet are choosing to compromise. **Regardless of the reasons, when we separate our faith from work, the result is that it will constantly leave us in frustration, discouragements, and disappointments.**

If this is all true, there is no doubt that there is a great need for us as believers to rediscover and anchor ourselves in the biblical understanding of work. Think about your own work. Do you find yourself consumed by work? Do you see the impact that your work is making in your life? In contrast, how much of your relationship with God is impacting the way you work? We must know how our daily work is connected to God’s ultimate purpose and how we can do our work according to God’s Word.

My desire is that we will do just that, as we look to our passage for today which is found in Colossians 3. So if you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Colossians 3:22-4:1.

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Let me point out one thing before we move on. Paul was addressing this passage to the slaves. Now, some of you may ask, “Why isn’t Paul fighting for the freedom of these slaves?” And it’s true that we don’t see Paul leading a movement to change the social structure of that day. What I can share at the moment is that slavery back then looked much different from the slavery that we know of today, which is abusive, violent, degrading, and dehumanizing. At the same time, this doesn’t in any way imply that the Bible embraces any kind of slavery. It’s actually the opposite. **The gospel continuously undermines slavery and aims to destroy it by transforming people’s hearts, because no ultimate change occurs until there is a change in the heart.** But for our purposes we’re not going to spend more time discussing this issue today. Nevertheless, it’s clear that Paul was talking to the slaves about the way they were working – and I believe that we can apply those truths to us today because His truth is timeless. I want to talk about three things from this passage:

- Who we work for
- How we should work
- Why we can work this way

Now, as I go through each point, I invite you to personalize this message by thinking about your own context. Listen intentionally. Whatever your job description may be, **listen to this message with your own workplace in mind and allow this truth to change the way you understand your job and the way you do your job.** If you need to, write down specific things you could apply starting tomorrow so that all of us can live up to what Paul challenges us in Colossians 3:17, which says, “*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*”

1) WHO WE WORK FOR

Let's turn to verse 23. Paul says, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, **as working for the Lord, not for human masters***" and in verse 24, he says, "***It is the Lord Christ you are serving.***" Paul makes it very clear that **when we work (and it really doesn't matter what you do), we are all working for the Lord.** Then take a moment to ask this question to yourself: "who am I working for today?" Honestly speaking, I don't think many of us ever asked this question because it's just assumed. Some of us may say, "I'm working for this or that company" or "I'm working for my boss." Some of us would say, "I'm working for my family – so that I could provide for their needs" or "I'm working for myself – so that I could buy what I want; so that I could have a nice vacation; so that I could feel secure about my future." And some of us really don't care who we work for. We work just because that's what we're supposed to do. But Paul clearly tells us that it is the Lord Christ we are serving. Now, what is the implication of this truth? Why is it important for us to know who we work for? **It's important because it means that everything we do (including our work) is an act of worship to God.**

Often we think of worship as something we do on Sunday and work as something we do on Monday. On Sunday we say we go to worship and on Monday we say we go to work – and though we understand what we mean by it, a careless usage of our language has caused this fogginess in our understanding of work and disconnection from our faith. As a result, it became easier for us to compartmentalize our lives according to how we see fit. All of a sudden, work is no longer in the same compartment as our faith. However, this is not what God designed or desires for our lives. Then in order to reorient our thinking on this, we must start with this truth: **Worship is not limited to a day or time but worship is life.** Worship is not limited to singing songs together on Sunday, though that's definitely an important part of it. But this does not define what worship is as a whole. **Rather, worshipping God means that we're giving worth and praise to Him because He deserves them; it's to be in awe of His beauty; it's to acknowledge His magnificence; it's to behold and experience His majestic glory** – and we do this in the context of singing, changing diapers, studying for an exam, brewing coffee, making a teaching plan, interacting with our business partners or customers, and so on. We must remember that work is not just a way to pass the time and make money. No matter what your job is, no matter what it is that you do, no matter who your boss is, or what kind of company you work for, what you do in your job is actually done in service to Jesus our King. Do you think about your job like that? He is the One who called you there for this time of your life, and it is for Him that you ultimately work.

I heard some people say something like this: "I'm not giving my all when I work because," and here are some reasons: "I don't like my job," "I'm not going to stay here long anyway," "I don't feel passionate about what I'm doing," or "I don't think God called me to this." But let me clarify something for you: **whatever you're doing right now, wherever you are, is exactly where God wants you to be.** He has called you to be there. And He desires you to worship Him through your work and He wants you to be the salt and light in your workplace. Of course, this doesn't mean that you can never change your job. But I'm simply trying to prevent you from not giving your best, because you believe that you were never called to be there or it's just a "transitional" job. Your job has purpose and meaning because you are doing it ultimately for the King. Brothers and sisters, in your workplace today, are you giving worth to God with all that you do? Do you realize who you're working for?

Then how do we reclaim this truth for ourselves? It has to be more than just saying, "Okay, I'll remind myself over and over again that I'm working for God," though that is important. But in order to do this better, **we must know and remember who God is.** Brothers and sisters, don't ever lose the wonder and weight of knowing who you worship and work for today. We're not working for just any god. We worship and work for the Creator God. He created all things from nothing. Not only that, He sustains and governs the universe. He has the authority to judge the world. Everything depends on God and everything operates within His will. He is the absolute standard of truth, goodness, and beauty.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He does everything as He pleases but everything He does is right. He is worthy of all praises. And the most amazing truth is that this sovereign and almighty God loves us – He wants to know us and have an intimate relationship with us. And to do that He sent His most precious Son Jesus Christ to make a way for us when there was no way. This is who our God is. **And this God has called you specifically and intentionally to be where you are to glorify Him with everything that you do.** As we reflect more and more on who He is and knowing that He called you there, how can we still work the same way we used to?

My prayer is that you'll intentionally discipline yourself to dwell in the Word so that you'll grow to know Him more and more. This is absolutely important because true worship naturally overflows from our hearts *as we grow in our understanding of God*. In other words, **your knowledge of God determines the measure of your passion for worship**. If you have a big view of God, worship will burst and erupt out of your lips, hearts, and lives. In contrast, if you have a small view of God, you will begin to worship the things that you consider big *in place of* God. Friends, if you're having difficulty using your work to worship Him for whatever reason (fear, laziness, or apathy), then ask yourself, "How big is my view of God? Am I growing in knowledge of who He is? Am I aware of the fact that He has called me here?" If your desire to know God withers away, your passion to worship God through your work will also inevitably diminish. We must fix our eyes upon Him and make Him the goal, desire, and treasure of our hearts.

Friends, when we realize that we work for God, it will radically change the way we work, which is my next point.

2) HOW WE SHOULD WORK

In this passage, Paul tells us three practical things.

First, in verse 22, we are called to obey our earthly masters in everything. Paul doesn't give us exceptions to this command. He doesn't say, "Serve only when these certain conditions are met." No, we are to obey in *everything*. What does this mean? It means that we must recognize the authority of our manager to be God-given and have the humility to submit to them. This is not easy to do. Our pride gets in the way. Your manager may be incompetent. Your director may be selfish, inconsiderate, unfair, and bossy. Your supervisor may be lazy. You may disagree with the decisions that were made by the executive team. And as a result, you find yourself frustrated, discouraged, and unmotivated. When your boss asks you to do something, you find yourself making excuses. **When Paul says that we must obey our earthly masters in everything, he implies that we need to treat our boss the way we treat Christ.** It also means that we are called to be faithful to all that we have been assigned to do. It means that we need to work hard.

Now, if you're the manager, this doesn't mean that you can mistreat your workers and take advantage of them. Paul says in 4:1, "*Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*" **If you're in the position where people are working for you, the Bible clearly commands you to be just and fair because you have a Master in heaven to whom you will give an account.** Again, this is not easy to do because of our pride or your worker may be incompetent. You may give many reasons why you mistreat your employees; but at the end, God demands justice and fairness from you because that's how He treated us. Then ask yourselves, "How am I treating my employees? Will they see Christ in me through the way I treat them?"

Second, Paul tells us that we are not to be people pleasers. Verse 22 says, "*Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor.*" Often times, many of us find ourselves falling into this temptation. What does it mean to be a people pleaser in our workplace? I'm pretty sure you could think of a few examples but it could mean that you work in a way that makes you look good but you don't necessarily work hard.

For example, you can spend all day staring at Facebook but as soon as your manager walks into the office, you change your screen and look like you were working hard. Your manager might be fooled for a while, but God is not. It could also mean that you work to be noticed by others. For example, you find yourself working long hours and drive yourself to the point of burn-out and exhaustion in order to be promoted, recognized, and praised by others because you want to get ahead of others.

Instead, thirdly, Paul tells us that we are to work with *sincerity* of heart and *reverence* for the Lord. The Greek word for “sincerity” is *haplotēs* which literally means singleness. In other words, Paul is saying, serve from your heart, soul, and body with one single purpose with complete devotion: reverence, fear, or awe of God. **Pastor Paul Tripp** said this: “The central most powerful thing that shapes and forms our thoughts, actions, words, decisions, and desires [as Christ followers] is and must be our awe of God.” It cannot be our own ambition and pride. It cannot be a convenience that drives us. The reason for all that we do must be intentionally done because of our awe of God.

When we forget this truth, it often causes us to either *idolize* our work or be *idle* at work. Think with me. **When we forget that we work with reverence for the Lord, our work begins to become the source of our ultimate satisfaction and meaning for us.** We give ourselves to them day in and day out. Our work becomes the primary *consumer* of our time, attention, energy, passions, and love, as well as the primary *means* for measuring our happiness and our dissatisfaction in life. If this is true, we are worshipping our jobs. **Sebastian Traeger**, a Christian author, said, “An idol is something that you desire more than you desire Jesus.” Does this describe you when it comes to your job?

In contrast, when we forget that we work with reverence for the Lord, we can also easily view our work as really no big deal. **We become idle at work.** I love how **Pastor Greg Gilbert** puts it: “Being idle [is] an inactivity of the heart, an inability or unwillingness to see or embrace God’s purposes in the work He’s given you to do.” When this kind of thinking takes hold in our minds, it always leads to joylessness, discontentment, and laziness. What does this look like? We give excuses not to do our work or do just enough of to keep our job. We diminish our purpose at work. Some of us genuinely believe that our value as a Christian is restricted to what we do at church, and the work we do is just a necessary evil we do to earn money in order to support the church. Some people say, “I work so I can play” and find themselves dreading Mondays while loving Fridays. They don’t care much about their job; they only care about the things their job allows them to do. If this describes you, you have forgotten the fact that God has purposes for us in our workplace. Our jobs are more than just a means to an end. However small or boring our jobs may be, God is maturing us as Christians through our work to bring glory to Himself.

Now, I wonder if any of you are asking this honest question: “How can anyone truly work this way?” “We are broken. We work with broken people. And we live in a broken world. You are asking us to do the impossible!” Or “Woohyun, you don’t know what I go through at work. Swearing is part of their everyday vocabulary. They gossip. They backstab. Their values and interests are so different from mine. It’s always easier said than done!” I want you to know that I’m not in any way minimizing the challenges that you face on a daily basis. The truth is that I respect all of you because I know that living out the gospel in your workplace is not easy. I’m thankful and encouraged by all of you who are fighting the good fight of faith. **But brothers and sisters, I want to remind you that we are all called to live this way not because it’s easy or just because I say so but because it’s right and pleasing to our God.** No one said it’s going to be easy. There will be a lot of questions and we need to wrestle hard in prayer as we follow Jesus Christ. But we are called to persevere and pursue Him because He is the greatest treasure we have. I invite you to do this because it brings joy to our Father’s heart. But thankfully, there’s a greater motivation to live and work this way than just saying, “Do it because it’s right,” which leads to my last point.

3) WHY WE CAN WORK THIS WAY

Let's read from verse 23. "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, **since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.***" **What's the reward you're looking for today?** What are you ultimately working for? Money, power, fame, comfort? A house at the beach? Helping a lot of people? If you're looking for these things, then yes, all that Paul said about how we need to work for the Lord will not just be hard, but impossible. We just can't work to worship God while working for these things. Again, this doesn't mean that these things aren't important. They are all part of our work – we do work for money and we do work to help others. But we just need to understand what our *ultimate* reward we're working for is every day. What do you want to get out of it?

Paul tells us that our reward is an inheritance from the Lord. The Greek word for "inheritance" also means "heirship." This is incredible. What Paul is saying is this: **we can work faithfully and with excellence to worship and glorify God no matter how hard it is, even if no one compensates for our labor, and even when no one notices, because we already have all that we want and need – namely the right to be God's children.** Although we were once enemies of God, we are now accepted and loved as His sons and daughters because of what Christ has done for us on the cross. We don't have to work or do something to prove our value and significance – they have been promised and given to us when we placed our faith in Christ. Even when we suffer now, eternal life with God is promised for us. In Genesis 15:1, God says, "*I am your shield, your very great reward.*" And *that* must be the greatest reward we desire as Christians – that must be something that our hearts find full contentment in. We have the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe as our Father; we owe Him for everything we have (namely, life and salvation) – what else should we desire and work for? **We don't work for our identity but we work out of our identity.**

Once we accept this truth and believe it, it begins to change the way we approach our work. **We are free, not to make our work into an idol, but to make it a place for loving God and loving others.** Our happiness is secured elsewhere; we don't have to be discouraged that our job isn't providing it. **We're also free from the trap of idleness, from growing frustrated and bitter by the challenges our job brings; instead, we can approach our job as an opportunity to bring glory to God.** We can let go of many things because we look forward to the life to come.

APPLICATION

I know there are people in this room who have never professed Jesus to be their Lord and Savior. If that's you, this teaching wouldn't have made sense to you – it's too radical, counter-cultural; too different from the values of the world that you and I live in; it might even be offensive to you and everything you believe in. But my prayer is that one day you'll experience the grace and love that has been displayed by the work of Christ on the cross. In Him, there is life. In Him, there is freedom from the bondage of our sin and of this world. **Christ makes all things new because you no longer have to work for value and significance – they are all given to you freely in Christ.** Today, I invite you to give your life to Jesus. Take that step of faith. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me or the person who brought you out today.

Now, if you're a Christian, here are some of the things you should consider:

Number one, attend the Work as Worship conference on Friday February 23. I encourage many of you, if not all, to come because it'll be a great opportunity to learn from pastors and other Christian businessmen and women what it means to live out our faith in the workplace, where we're constantly tempted to work apart from the gospel. If you have more questions, speak to me after.

Secondly, work to love God. Jesus said: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*” (Matthew 22:37). Before anything else, we should love God in and through our jobs. I don’t think we need any other motivator to work hard and well.

Thirdly, work to love others. Jesus also said: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:38). Just as our love for God should motivate us to do our work well, so should our love for other people. **Martin Luther** said, “When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal.” God provides for everyone’s needs through the work He calls all of us to do. When we give our time and ability for our city, we are doing what God intended for us.

Lastly, work to make the gospel attractive. The truth is that the way we work can say a lot about who God is because we are all ambassadors of Christ. When people see us, they don’t just see us; they see Christ through us. Then let us be intentional in the way we work because it’s a great way of testifying to the goodness of Christ and the beauty of the gospel to our co-workers.

I know that these applications were very general. But I pray that you’ll take time to reflect and think about how *practically* you can love God, love others, and make the gospel attractive in your own workplace. It will be great if you could speak to someone who is in the same field of work as you so that you can brainstorm and pray together. Keep each other accountable.

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, our work is an expression of our faith and love to God. Everything we do is an act of worship to God whether it’s at home, at work, or at church. I shared this in the beginning of my message but I’ll say it again as we end. May all of us live according to Colossians 3:17, which says, “*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*”

Let’s pray.