

## Lesson 17

Colossians 3:22-4:1

Day 1

- As you may have noticed, Ephesians is a very similar book to Colossians in several paragraphs. This is true for Colossians 3:22-4:1 and Ephesians 6:5-9. Read both of the texts below and make observations about their similarities and differences. I suggest you highlight the similarities and write down the differences.

Colossians 3:22-4:1	Ephesians 6:5-9
<p>22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who <i>merely</i> please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.</p> <p>4 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.</p> <p><b>Differences:</b></p>	<p>5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. 9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.</p>

## Day 2

2. In these passages, we see another group of people we have not yet heard about, listed as those under authority. Read this article about slaves in the time of the New Testament times, and write down anything that gives you a new perspective on Paul's instructions to slaves and masters.

Slavery was taken for granted as a normal part of life in the ancient world. Indeed, the whole structure of Roman society was based on it. "Slavery grew with the growth of the Roman state until it changed the economic basis of society, doing away with free labor, and transferring nearly all industries to the hands of slaves" (Marvin R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979], p. 162). During the period of the wars of conquest, most slaves were war captives. By the time of the New Testament, however, most slaves were born into slavery. The number of slaves was enormous, making up as much as one third of the population of the Empire.

Slaves were not actually considered persons under the law, but the chattel property of their owners. They could be sold, exchanged, given away, or seized to pay their master's debt. A slave had no legal right to marriage, and slave cohabitation was regulated by their masters. As already noted, masters had almost unlimited power to punish their slaves. The Roman writer Juvenal told of a wealthy woman who ordered the crucifixion of a slave and refused to give any reason except her own good pleasure.

By the New Testament era, however, slavery was changing. Treatment of slaves was improving, in part because masters came to realize that contented slaves worked better. Although not legally recognized as persons, slaves began to acquire some legal rights. In A.D. 20, the Roman senate decreed that slaves accused of crimes were to be tried in the same manner as free men (A. Rupprecht, "Slave, Slavery," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977], 5:459). In some cases, their wills were recognized as valid. They were often permitted to own property.

Slaves were often better off than freemen. They were assured of food, clothing, and shelter, while poor freemen often slept in the streets, or in cheap housing. Freemen had no job security and could lose their livelihood in times of economic duress. Many slaves ate and dressed as well as freemen. Slaves could be doctors, musicians, teachers, artists, librarians, and accountants. It was not uncommon for a Roman to train a slave at his own trade. They had opportunities for education and training in almost all disciplines.

By the first century, freedom was a real possibility for many slaves. Owners often held out the hope of freedom to inspire their slaves to work better. Many shared deep friendships with their masters and were loved and cared for with generosity. Many slaves would not have taken their freedom if it had been offered because their employment was happy and beneficial. Slaves could also purchase their own freedom. Masters often designated in their wills that their slaves were to be freed or receive part of their estate after the master's death. Manumission was thus widespread. One study indicated that in the period 81–49 b.c., five hundred thousand slaves were freed (Rupprecht, 5:458). By the time of Augustus Caesar, so many slaves were being freed upon the death of their owners that a law had to be passed restricting that practice (Rupprecht, 5:459). Estimates of the average length of time a slave had to wait for his freedom range from seven to twenty years.

It is significant that the New Testament nowhere attacks slavery directly. Had Jesus and the apostles done so, the result would have been chaos. Any slave insurrection would have been brutally crushed, and the slaves massacred. The gospel would have been swallowed up by the message of social reform. Further, right relations between slaves and masters made it a workable social institution, if not an ideal one. Christianity, however, sowed the seeds of the destruction of slavery. It would be destroyed not by social upheaval, but by changed hearts.

(<https://www.gty.org/resources/print/bible-qna/BQ070912>)

What I learned about New Testament slavery:

Day 3

- In Colossians 3:22, what is the one command given to slaves?
- In the following chart, fill in how that one command was to be carried out. It's okay if not all of the rows are filled.

From: Colossians 3:22-25	From: Ephesians 6:5-8

- Which characteristics are similar in the two passages above? Draw a line from column one to column two, to show the similar characteristics.
- Remembering these aspects of obedience can be extremely helpful as we are doing our daily work. Use the acronym, FISHIN to help your remember each aspect:

**F**ear the Lord's \_\_\_\_\_ (Col. 3:25, Eph. 6:5)

**I** \_\_\_\_\_ is coming (Col. 3:24, Eph. 6:8)

**S**incerity (pure, devoted) of \_\_\_\_\_ (Col. 3:22, Eph. 6:5)

**H**eartily, for \_\_\_\_\_ alone (Col. 3:23, Eph. 6:7)

**I**n all \_\_\_\_\_ (Col. 3:22)

**N**ot just to please \_\_\_\_\_ (Col. 3:22, Eph. 6:6)

- How would this kind of renewed lifestyle have been an effective evangelism tool for slaves to other slaves? How can a lifestyle of submission be winsome to the lost? (Matthew 5:16, Colossians 4:5-6, 1 Peter 3:15-16)

## Day 4

8. Jesus called himself a servant. Mark 10:45 says, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.” Look up the following verses and note which aspects of obedience (from Question 6) Jesus displayed to HIS heavenly master, and in what way it was displayed:

Philippians 2:8: *in all things – Jesus obeyed to the point of death*

Luke 5:15-16/Matthew 6:5: (not to please men)

Revelation 3:21: (inheritance)

John 4:34: (heartily for God alone)

Mark 14:35-36/Isaiah 11:2-3: (fearing the Lord)

1 Peter 2:22/Matthew 4:1-10: (sincerity/pure devotion)

9. What two motivations are given in Colossians 3:24 for a slave to obey his earthly master? How would this be a comfort to them? How is this a comfort to us?



### GROWING IN RESPECT TO SALVATION

10. Because Jesus obeyed perfectly, His righteous life is imparted to us, and we have access to the same power that helped Jesus to obey the authority in his life. What authority is in your life? Some of you have home authorities (husbands) and some of you have additional authorities outside of your home (bosses). Evaluate yourself in the six areas listed in Colossians. Pick two specific areas that need attention and write down how you will seek to change your heart attitude and your actions with the help of the Holy Spirit.

*Example: in all things:* There is one particular task that I really hate doing. I cringe a little when my husband asks me to do it. I know that he doesn't like to do it either (which doesn't help my attitude sometimes). However, he is not asking me to sin; therefore, I wish to do the thing he is asking me to do with sincerity of heart because I am really serving Christ.

## Day 5

11. In Ephesians 6:9, masters are given commands also. What commands are they given, and why are they to keep these commands?
12. How would this treatment of their slaves have been a huge testimony of Christ's renewal in their lives?



### GROWING IN RESPECT TO SALVATION

13. Read the following summary of this section from John MacArthur in his commentary on Colossians before answering the question at the end:

The final relationship in an ancient home was that of masters and slaves... In our day, that relationship can largely be compared to that of employer and employee. It should be noted that although the Word of God never advocates slavery, it does recognize it as an element of society that could be beneficial if both slaves and masters treated each other as they should. Far from seeking to abolish slavery, the Lord and the apostles use it as a motif for spiritual instruction, by likening the believer, one who belongs to Christ and serve him, to a slave.... Rather than commanding slaves to rebel and overthrow slavery, Paul says, "in all things obey those who are your masters on earth." It is really irrelevant what the social form may be, slavery or freedom – if the relationship is godly. As in relationships between husband and wife and parents and children, the principle of authority and submission is central to Paul's thought in all things is a comprehensive phrase referring to both enjoyable and distasteful duties. The obedience required of slaves is not external service, doing a duty with it reluctant attitude as those who merely please man. Rather, Christian servants are to please the Lord by working with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Holding God and his will in high regard is the right motive they are to work heartily (putting their whole inner man into effort), as for the Lord rather than for men, serving their master as they would the Lord himself.

Paul gives two reasons for slaves or employees to obey their masters. Positively the Lord will repay them for their faithfulness. They can endure iniquity now, knowing that from the Lord they will receive the reward of the inheritance. The earthly master or boss may not give the servant what he deserves, but the Lord will. He is the one who will assure the eternal compensation is what it should be. Christian slaves are also heirs of eternal reward. As an employee on the job or a servant in the home, it is the Lord Christ believers serve, and he will pay them back with grace and generosity. Paul then gives a negative reason for obedience. The one who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. The warning is that the Lord will discipline without partiality in cases of disobedience. Paul acknowledged that the Christian slave, Onesimus, was responsible to repay Philemon

(Philemon 18). The Christian servant is not to presume on his Christianity to justify disobedience. Even if we are God's children, we will reap what we sow, because God is impartial. On the other side of the relationship, Masters are to treat their slaves with justice and fairness as they expect to receive from their Master in Heaven. God will judge masters who mistreat their slaves as he will slaves who fail to serve their masters. As noted in the discussion of Colossians 3:11, slaves and masters are spiritually equal in Christ. Masters must accordingly treat their Christian servants as brothers in Christ, And acting toward them all the virtues required for holy fellowship. They should treat their employees like they desire the Lord Jesus to treat them. If all Christians displayed the characteristics of relationships as embodied in the principles of this text, the result would be dramatic. Believers would indeed become lights shining in the darkness.

Think about those over whom you have authority. Are there ways in which you are treating them harshly or threatening them? Of what heart attitudes and actions do you need to repent? How do you think this will affect the testimony of your faith to your "subjects" and to those who see your treatment of them?