

The Freedom of Slavery: Do it for the Lord!  
Colossians 3:22-25

Turn to Colossians 3 please. The freedom of slavery is this: do it for the Lord. This sermon is for all those believers who feel themselves trapped in a life they don't want, of caught in a tangle of duties and responsibilities that do not satisfy them. Everyone's life has some of this, and some of us have a lot of this. How will we survive all these tasks that seem meaningless, all these tiresome jobs we have to do again and again? This sermon is for you.

This sermon is also for people who would like to serve the Lord full time, they want to go somewhere and do something important for the Lord, but they cannot. They are stuck in an ordinary boring life. And all those fine things that they could have done for the Lord they won't ever get a chance to do.

The gospel of Jesus leaves no one out. Do you want to serve the Lord faithfully, morning to night? That can be done, no problem! You can do it right where you are! This week and next week we'll talk about the gospel that leaves no one out. This week we work with slavery, and next Sunday with calling.

Here's something peculiar about the parables of Jesus: when he talks about his followers in parables, his followers are more often slaves than anything else. Sometimes we are plants, or sheep, or branches, or soil, or fish. But the most common one is slaves. Most Bibles translate this as "servant," but in Greek it is always *doulos*, "slave."

So at some level, every believer needs to absorb what God says to slaves. We'll begin with Colossians 3:17, which says in a more general way what we read later to slaves.

Whatever you Do – Col 3:17

*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.*

"Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" is not a formula to speak. This means, "do this because Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life." Everything you and I do, what we say and what we do, we do it because Jesus is Lord and he owns every bit of us.

The beauty here is that these words are not trying to change what we do or who we talk to. These words do not change our ordinary lives at all, looking from the outside, but it sure changes why we act and speak.

Here we're reading what Paul says to the whole church; his words to slaves just spell out the details a little more.

“Giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Do you know what troubles me about how the apostles speak of thankfulness? They never thank God for anything this life could take away. They only thank God for the things that our faith in Christ has guaranteed.

In Colossians 1, Paul thanks God for three things: 1, we have been *rescued* from the authority of darkness; 2, we’ve been *transferred* into the kingdom of the Son God loves, and 3, we our names are *entered* to receive an inheritance from God. The trouble is that I sort of know these things but I focus on things I can see.

The Colossians had troubles. Not persecution, that we can tell, just troubles. Do you know how Paul prayed about their troubles? He prayed that the believers would be strengthened, with all the might of God’s power, so they could show great endurance and patience. That’s not how I pray about my troubles, but that’s how Paul prayed. All the apostles write like this.

Let’s do this, in our thankfulness: let’s discipline ourselves to thank God for the invisible things this world cannot ever take away. Let’s include these. Now to slaves in 3:22-25.

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 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. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.*

Complete Obedience to Earthly Masters – Col 3:22

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything.* That’s blunt! There is no wiggle room in there at all. And the thing is, in the NT this is the normal posture of all believers to our earthly masters.

Earlier in Colossians 3, Paul wrote that in the church there was no slave or free. No Jew or Gentile, no slave or free, but Christ is in all. Maybe believing slaves tended to think this gave them some flexibility in obeying earthly masters. But it didn’t.

When does “obey your earthly masters in everything” *NOT* apply? No doubt there are some exceptions, but we’ll not get into that. What made Jesus famous is that he emptied himself and became a slave, he humbled himself and became obedient. Paul wrote to that Philippian church, “you believers be like that, have the same way of thinking as Jesus had.”

The question is not, “are there any exceptions to obeying earthly masters in everything?” The question is, “am I that kind of a person, that thinks like Jesus?” And Ed Neufeld is not, I will tell you. I have work to do on this.

Whose Eye to Seek?

*Obey them not only when **their** eye is on you and to curry **their** favor, but with sincere hearts and reverence for **the Lord**.*

The commands of the earthly lord begin this, but after that slaves replace the earthly lord with the Lord of heaven and earth. Slaves were to take the word of the human lord as coming from the Lord of heaven and earth. (2x) Work with sincere hearts and reverence for the Lord.

It had to be very hard for slaves to work with any kind of diligence. Lots of drudgery, menial unpleasant jobs, lots of repetition, same things again and again, and no reward. Paul says, don't work so they will like you when they watch you, work well because Jesus is your Lord. Jesus is the one you want to honour and please. His eye is on you.

But you know that to a greater or lesser extent, this is all of us. Our life requires us to do enough things that we have no interest in doing, which it hard to do with sincere hearts. Some of these duties come to us through unpleasant people. Let's do it with our eye on the Lord, and reverence for the Lord.

Who do we Serve? – Col 3:23

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for humans.*

This the same basic call in different words. Whatever you're doing, imagine that Jesus had just come to you, and he had named your dreary task, and he said, "Do this for me, I want you to do this very thing." We love the Lord, so we would do it, and we would do a better job than if we were thinking about the unpleasant human or whatever else guides us into this.

This is that replacement again. Whatever compels you or me to act, we replace that master with the Lord. And listen, people, this is not just a mind game. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. Colossians 1 says that "in Christ all things were created, all thrones and powers and authorities, visible and invisible." Colossians 2 says "he is head over all power and authority."

When we say, "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth," we mean that. He is head over all power and authority. All powers and authorities answer to him. So this is not a mind trick, or a motivational tip to fool ourselves into living better. He is the Lord of all, and ultimately every human on this planet is dealing with the Lord of all in every single thing they and we do. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord."

This Lord Rewards his Slaves – Col 3:24

*You know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*

Slaves did not get paid, there was no reward, and no inheritance. Somewhere I read that it was against Roman law to give an inheritance to a slave. In any case, slavery separated families all the time, and even if you knew where your parents were when they died, they were slaves too, and they had nothing to give you.

This Lord rewards his slaves, and he gives them an inheritance. The earliest churches attracted many slaves and poor people, because slaves and the poor were treated better in the church than they were treated anywhere else. In Christ, everyone was on the same level, slaves were honoured citizens of the kingdom just like everyone else.

“You know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” No one else in the Roman empire spoke to slaves like that. And this is for us as well. When his eye is on us, that means he’s keeping track, and the reward to faithful servants is inheritance.

Have you ever wished a rich old relative would write you into their will? That would solve some problems, wouldn’t it? What if the Maker of heaven and earth put your name in his will? When we receive the Lord, that’s what happens. We inherit from God. He will not die, but like some others he gives this away while he lives. Slaves who obeyed human masters as they would obey the Real Lord would receive this inheritance.

This is the freedom of slavery. We can all be in full time Christian service, and rewarded for it by the Lord, without changing our daily job description. We just change who we do it for, because he’s Lord of heaven and earth. And he rewards us.

It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Paul has already said this twice, but he wants to make real sure they get it and we get it. The replacement is complete. We have shifted from the earthly lord to the heavenly Lord. Let’s put this line together with the first line. “Obey your earthly lords in everything, for it is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

And again, this is not a mind game we play with ourselves, so we can have better attitude. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he does have full rights to my life. This is for all of us. “Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do it all for Jesus the Lord.”

Payment Works Both Ways for Everyone – Col 3:25

*Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.*

This line has good news and bad news. For slaves, it was mostly good news. There were some terrible slave masters in those days, as you can imagine, unreasonable and cruel. There are still managers who think the best way to lead is to be harsh. *Anyone* who does wrong will be repaid, people. They will be repaid for their wrongs.

No one gets special treatment, there is no favoritism with God. Slaves and masters will stand side by side in this. And it will happen, folks, without fail. There will be justice. They will be repaid for their wrongs.

The bad news is that if we are deceitful slaves, if we reject what God has shown us and give sloppy careless service to our earthly masters, we will answer to the Lord of Lords about this, because we really were his slaves all along. “No favoritism” goes both ways.

### Conclusion

Whatever we do, in word or deed, let’s do it all for the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Whatever we do.

No believer is ever caught or trapped in a life that keeps us from serving Christ all the time. This includes children and youth, who have duties at home, jobs your parents tell you to do. This includes what teachers tell students to do. “Obey your earthly lords in everything, for it is the Lord Christ you are serving.” Let’s do it all for the Lord.

And this includes rest as well. From the start, God commanded rest. Resting is part of what we do because we are the Lord’s faithful slaves.

And if the Lord calls you to something that is obvious ministry of some kind, then by all means do it. Maybe it is a mission trip the Lord wants, maybe it is a long term career change, then do it, because Jesus is Lord and we serve him. But remember that when you are doing this special thing, you are not serving the Lord any more than you were last week in your ordinary life.

In three of his letters, Paul introduced himself as the Lord’s slave. Peter and James and Jude all did this as well. The apostles were the Lord’s slaves, and the slaves were the Lord’s slaves. None of us can change jobs and be any more the Lord’s slave than we are right now.

The freedom of slavery needs this: that we want to give our whole lives to the Lord. The gospel leaves out no one who wants to live that way, even those who don’t have choice about anything. We could make next year a year of full time service to the Lord, without changing the shape of our days at all. It requires this: that we want to give our whole lives to the Lord.

**PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, we do want to give our whole lives to you. We all want that. We often don’t know how to do that, but this Scripture takes us closer. Lead us in the right path for your name’s sake. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** May the God of peace equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord!