

Working for the Lord—The Slave Becomes a Free Man
Col. 3: 22—4:1; Eph. 6: 5-9

Introduction

There is a well-known story about three stone masons who were working on a large cathedral in Europe. I suppose the story is made up, but there may be some historical basis for it. A visitor watching the work in progress and wishing to inquire what kind of building was being constructed walks up to one stone mason and asks him, “What are you doing?” The gruff stone mason answers abruptly, “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m laying stone!”

Considering the kind of work they do all day long, stone masons can be rather rude, so the visitor unhindered in the least from his quest of finding out what was going on, asks another stone mason, “What are you doing?” to which the second stone mason replies, “I’m building a wall.” This second answer was more helpful, but still unsatisfactory. The visitor still didn’t know what the wall was for. So he hesitantly but hopefully approaches yet another stone mason with the same question, “Excuse me sir,” (perhaps this time a little more politeness will accomplish his goal) “may I ask what are you doing?” The stone mason looked up at him with a large smile on his face and with a look of dignity and pride says, “I’m building a magnificent cathedral for the glory of God!”

What was the difference in what these three men were doing? The skills were the same; the stones were the same; the building project was the same. The difference was in their minds and hearts. The first mason didn’t have the big picture, and really didn’t know what he was doing. The second mason had a bigger picture, but was still living in a very small world consisting of stone walls. The third mason understood the big picture—working for the glory of God—and this picture made all the difference in his enjoyment, and most likely the quality, of his labor.

Both the passages we have read this morning are written to Christian slaves. Some historians have estimated that during this period of the Roman Empire possibly one third of the population of Rome itself consisted of slaves, and it is also likely that Ephesus and Colossae also had many slaves. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that in the 1st century Christian church the proportion of slaves would be far greater than masters. Writing to the Corinthian church Paul acknowledged the humble status of most Corinthian Christians, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong” (1 Cor. 1: 27). This may account for the fact that the number of verses in *Ephesians* and *Colossians* devoted to slaves is also greater than the number of verses devoted to masters. At any rate, the Apostle is concerned about the behavior of slaves toward their masters and the behavior of masters toward their slaves.

Of course, when serious Bible students look at this passage, the question always comes up: Why didn’t Paul condemn the practice of slavery outright instead of laying down general principles? I will attempt to answer this question in my Pastoral Epistles class on Monday, but I will give you the short version now, what Americans call the “Reader’s Digest” version.

First, Paul was not so foolish to attempt overthrowing the normal social structure of his day with an outright, blatant condemnation of slavery. Had he done so, it is quite possible that the

Christian slaves could have misused this information to start a slave revolt which would have had disastrous consequences for all slaves and especially those in the Christian church. Besides, the condemnation of slavery would have done little good, anyway. Christians were a very small minority of the population and had no political power. The pagan Roman population was not about to give up their slaves since their affluent lifestyles depended on slavery.

Second, the institution of slavery was not absolutely forbidden in OT law, but regulated in such a way to minimize the abuses of slavery, making it a *livable situation at least within the covenant community of Israel*. Masters couldn't beat their slaves without being forced by law to set them free, and every Israelite slave had to be set free in six years or every Jubilee year (every 50th year) whichever came first. Of course, Paul was not in any position to enforce Biblical law on the pagan Roman Empire; but he could impose some general rules upon the New Covenant community, the church, which made the lives of slaves *bearable and even enjoyable* under Christian masters. Besides, he also knew that many people in the ancient world, including Christians, could not survive on their own as free men since they had no other means of employment. Slavery was far better than starvation, and to abolish the practice all at once may have been more harmful than slavery itself.

At any rate, Paul was not interested in any *external* solutions to the problems associated with slavery but only *internal* solutions. In society, slavery would continue to exist even among Christians; but inside the covenant community, there was really only *one kind of slavery*—*slavery to Christ*. Paul did not recognize *social status* in the church—and I wish that modern Christians didn't either—and it is entirely conceivable that Christian slaves could reach a level of spiritual maturity which made them eligible for the office of elder, in which case they would have a spiritual authority over their masters. There are no actual cases of this in the Bible and probably the social situation would have made this impossible, but at least we read in Paul's letter to *Philemon*, that Philemon, a slave owner, was supposed to treat Onesimus, his runaway slave who was returning, no longer simply as a slave, but as a *beloved brother* in Christ (v. 16).

In Christ Jesus, there is *neither* slave *nor* free man. The very fact that Paul is *even addressing* slaves and masters in the *same letter* and in the same *part* of the letter would have been outrageous to most Roman citizens, and the very fact that he does so proves that he recognizes *no such social hierarchy* within the covenant community. In the world, yes, by practical necessity; but in the church, no. Slaves didn't sit over *here* and masters over *there*. No. When the masters came to worship, they worshipped *with* their slaves on a *level place at the feet of Jesus*. It must have been an amazing sight to see.

The church was a family, and *social relationships* in the family were governed by a *higher standard* than that of society in general. Paul wanted the light of the gospel to shine even into the *deepest, darkest corners of society*; even into the institution of slavery. Slavery was a big *problem* but it was also a bigger *opportunity*. Slaves who had been lazy, disobedient, and dishonest should now become hard-working, obedient, and honest *because* of their Christian faith. Masters who were harsh and unreasonable should now become considerate, compassionate and generous. And in this way the *watching world*—so skeptical and critical of the Christian faith—could look at the church and say, “Do you see how they love one another? Even the slaves love their masters, and the masters treat their slaves with dignity and respect. How is this possible? Where do these people come from, the moon?”

As the Christian faith permeated and influenced many cultures, the institution of slavery eventually would be abolished throughout the world in most places—not primarily by armed conflict, as in the US, but through the tireless efforts of Christians using legislative means, as it happened in England through the work of William Wilberforce.

But all of this is just introduction. What has this passage to do with ***free men and free women*** like ourselves? Well, it is not by accident that Paul speaks to ***slaves*** rather than free employees who can take their labor anywhere they please. ***If there was anyone who was likely to despise his work, it would have been the slave who did not even own his own labor.*** And no matter how much he despised it, he couldn't leave it.

Ugandans work for me all the time. They come and go as they please, and I pay them according to their work. And if they decide not to show up for work the next day there is nothing I can do about it except not pay them for that day. They are not my slaves, and if they wish to do some other kind of work elsewhere, they are free to do so. ***But the slave had no choice.*** He had to show up for work each day, and he had to do whatever he was told to do, however unpleasant the task.

Yet, speaking to slaves, Paul says, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Main Idea:

By making this statement, the apostle is teaching slaves a ***very important principle***, a principle which works for ***you and me*** as well. So listen up, because here it is: ***by working for the Lord rather than for men, the slave becomes free.*** His master doesn't let him go, but his mind becomes free, and he is no longer in bondage to his work.

I sincerely hope that ***all*** of you are free in Christ. It is for freedom that Christ has set you free, and I will address ***all*** of you this morning as free men and women, brothers and sisters in Christ. But ***some*** of you—certainly ***not all*** of you—***become slaves when you work.*** W O R K !!!—that dirty, four letter word. Why is this? ***Because you are not applying your freedom in Christ to your work.*** It is a common sin, and I am often guilty of it myself, so I am speaking as a sinner to fellow sinners. Now since we don't need any slaves here at WTC—only free men and free women—I have come this morning with the word of God hopefully ***to set you free.***

I want you to consider ***four questions*** from the text which will set you free in your work—the ***what?*** the ***how?*** the ***who?*** and the ***what for?***

I. First, the what? What kind of work can be pleasing to the Lord?

Of course we all know the answer to this question, don't we? Evangelism, preaching, mercy ministries, teaching theology—anything related to ***church*** work. This is kind of work which can be pleasing to the Lord. Anything else is just something we have to do to get by in life, get out of the way, and get back to the work of the Lord.

But this is not what Paul says. In Eph. 6: 5 Paul says, “Slaves, be **obedient** to those who are your masters...”, and in Col. 3:22 he says, “Slaves, in **all things** obey those who are your masters...” But masters did not purchase slaves to do evangelism and preaching. They purchased slaves to wash their clothes, to cook their meals, to build their buildings, to plant and harvest their fields, to wash their feet, and to dig and clean their latrines. This is what slaves did; they rendered some kind of service (Eph. 6: 7). And when the master asked the slave to do something, Paul, of all people, commands Christian slaves to do what they were told to do. When they did it in a certain way—which I will mention in just a minute—they were doing “**the will of God**” (notice Eph. 6: 6).

So **what kind** of work can be pleasing to the Lord? What kind of work is the **will** of God? Paul answers this question explicitly in Col. 3: 23, “**Whatever you do...**” That covers just about everything. It covers everything which is not forbidden in scripture. We cannot sell illegal drugs to the glory of God and we cannot sell sex to the glory of God. We can’t steal for the glory of God. But every form of productive work can be done for the glory of God. Once again I must ask you this question: How will you appreciate and minister to people who labor with their hands if you have no understanding of the significance of their labor? The answer to that question is that everything we do has significance under certain conditions.

The important question is not the **what you do? It’s the how, the who, and the what for?**

II. Second question: the how? How can your work be pleasing to God?

Several things are mentioned in the texts of *Ephesians* and *Colossians*. In *Ephesians*, Paul says, “with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart” (6: 5). What does he mean? Does Paul imply that slaves must humble themselves before their masters with fear and trembling? Or must we humble ourselves before our employers? Well, Paul does expect us to respect our employers, but **the fear and trembling** cannot be directed to the **master** or the **employer** for at least three reasons.

First, Paul says that we should not be “men-pleasers” but we should be “slaves of Christ”. If our fear and trembling is directed to our employer then we have become men-pleasers who are only concerned about what our **employer** thinks of us. Solomon warns us about the fear of men, “The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted (Prov. 29: 25). If you only fear your employer, your work can’t be pleasing to God.

Second, Paul uses this phrase, “fear and trembling” many times in his epistles, and it never refers to the fear of men but the fear of God. In his first letter to the Corinthians he says, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2: 3). Does Paul mean that he was afraid of the Corinthians? Does Paul strike you as someone who was afraid of people? I don’t think so.

But **thirdly**, and more directly Paul explicitly tells us in *Colossians*, “not with external service, as those who **merely** please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing **the Lord**” (v. 22). Since Paul is speaking about the same subject—work—in the same context in two epistles, unless we have compelling evidence to the contrary, “**fear**” means the same thing in both epistles—the fear of the **Lord** and not the fear of **men**.

Furthermore, he also says in Ephesians, “not by way of *eyeservice*, as men-pleasers” and in Colossians, “not with *external* service, as those who *merely* please men.” Do you know what eyeservice is? You see it all the time. While the boss is looking, the worker is busy about his work—hoeing, shoveling, slashing, on so on. But when the boss goes inside or leaves the house, the worker looks around to see if anyone else is looking, and if no one is looking, he stops. The other day I left the house with my Ugandan laborer busily sloping off the sides of dirt bank to give them a smooth shape, and he was doing a good job—while I was there. When Silas came home he was fast asleep under a jack fruit tree—not the best tree to sleep under—but it didn’t seem to worry him. If I have to *watch* you work to *make* you work, you are a *men-pleaser*.

This is what Paul means by *external* service—service which is just on the *surface of things*, service which is *sure to be noticed by other people*. Service which is not noticed by others is *wasted*—right? Wrong. *God sees it*. He sees the dirty corner of the room you just cleaned up—the corner no one else will notice. He knows whether the toilet was cleaned yesterday or whether you left it for someone else to clean today. He knows when and how well you dusted off the books in the library or whether you carelessly replaced them on the shelves upside down so no one could read the Library of Congress numbering system.

God will know how many hours of diligent labor you spent preparing a sermon so that your congregation can go about *their work of service* the rest of the week. And many times you will be tired and tempted to say, “They won’t notice whether my interpretation is sloppy or accurate”, and He will say right back to you, “Maybe not. But I will.” And if you are not faithful in a little thing like cleaning a toilet and putting in your farming hours, why should God entrust a big thing to you like pastoring a congregation? “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much” (Luke 16:10).

External service, eyeservice, is not the *how* of the Christian worker. The *how* of the Christian worker is *internal*— “in the sincerity of your heart”, “doing the will of God from the heart”, rendering service “with good will”, doing “your work *heartily*”. The literal reading of “do your work heartily” is “work from the soul”. In other words, when you work, Paul says, “*put your whole soul into it*; put your whole *being* into the work.” Digging in the garden? Yes. Cleaning the floors? Yes. Reading your assignments? Yes, and not just to make the grade, but pleasing the Lord with your *best* effort.

“Hands to the work. Hearts to God.” The Shakers’ theology wasn’t so good, but they got that one right. And because the Shakers got the *how* right, the quality of their work was excellent and the name “Shaker” has come down to us in the history books, not for their theology, but for their superb craftsmanship in furniture-making.

III. The Who?—For whom do we work?

But this brings us to the *who? For whom do we work? Who’s your boss?* The *what*, as I said, is not so important. Any kind of work can be *as pleasing to the Lord as any other kind of work*. It’s not the *what* that really matters, but the *how*. How do we go about doing our work—with eyeservice or sincerely from the heart?

But we really can’t get the how right if we fail to get the who right? And of course, we know *who* He is, don’t we? Notice from the very beginning of the text in Ephesians and Colossians

that Paul carefully distinguishes between *two different masters*, “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters *according to the flesh*” (6: 5), and in Colossians he says, “Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters *on earth*” (3: 22). There are masters “according to the flesh” and there are masters “on earth”, and *then* there is *The Master* in heaven. Paul wants us to concentrate our attention on *this Master*. Therefore, throughout both texts, Paul uses phrases like, “as to Christ”, “as slaves of Christ”, “as to the Lord, and not to men”, and “as for the Lord rather than for men”, “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” The whole text is saturated with references to Christ.

What is Paul saying? He’s saying, “When you get right down to it, you only have *one* Master and *one* person to please. You are *Christ’s* slave and you are working for *Christ Himself*.”

Knowing the who is the secret to the how. We have to remember who we are really working for. The only way you can do our work with the *whole soul* is to know that your service is rendered *to the Lord and that the Lord doesn’t miss a thing you do*. Probably few other people are going to *recognize or even be aware* of what you do in this life. So whatever you do, do it for Him, or you won’t be *able* to do it. Why not? Because there is *far too much frustration, far too many thorns and thistles in your labor and mine to keep ourselves encouraged otherwise*.

Listen carefully. Human masters don’t congratulate their slaves for work well-done; so don’t expect sinful human beings to *affirm or recognize you for your gifts and contributions*. They *should* but they often *don’t*. For most of us there isn’t going to be a banquet given in our honor or an engraved plaque with the inscription, “For forty years of faithful service to so and so.”

The Christian church should be discovering and affirming people’s spiritual gifts and encouraging them to use and to cultivate their many talents for the Lord, but sadly it just doesn’t work out this way often enough. I didn’t come to Africa because the elders of my church took me aside and said, “Don, we think you are able to teach, and we want you to use those gifts in Africa to train pastors. Furthermore, you have a wonderful, talented wife who will help you accomplish this task. Go with our prayers and blessings. When Fran and I left the US, most of the elders of our church never even shook our hands as we went out the door. A little over a year after we left for Africa they dropped our support, and we had to scramble to get some more.

The only way we can stay encouraged in what we do here is *to know the One for whom we are really working*. And it is *enough* for us to hope for those wonderful words from Christ when we appear before His throne, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master.”

So tell me, *how will you stay encouraged?* How will you spend those extra hours of labor and ministry when no one seems to notice or if people are complaining about what you do? If you are a men-pleaser, you won’t be able to make it, but if you are doing it for the Lord, He will give you the strength to persevere.

Answer this question: If Christ were to personally ask you to clean the floor of this room, or write this paper, or harvest this garden, or preach this sermon—what kind of effort would you give Him? *But that is precisely what He does every single day*. So what kind of effort *are* you giving Him? *Are you working like a slave or a free man?* Are you just laying stone; are you

building a wall; or are you building a cathedral for the glory of God? It all depends on your perspective.

IV. But what for? This is the last question answered in our texts.

Now the ***who*** should be sufficient incentive for any diligent labor on our part. It should be enough for us to know that everything we do we are doing ***for the Lord***, our true Master. However, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul knew that we needed an ***additional incentive*** or ***motivation***. The additional incentive or motivation for obedience is found in Eph. 6: 8, “knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” It is also found in Col. 3: 24-25, “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.”

Notice that both ***positive*** and ***negative*** motivation is given. The positive motivation is given in both ***Ephesians*** and ***Colossians***, the negative motivation only in ***Colossians***.

Did you know that there is a reward in heaven for cleaning floors, cooking, and digging, and driving a bus if we do it for the right person and with the right motives? There is. Paul was not speaking to pastors and theologians in this passage; he was speaking to ***slaves*** who did ordinary, common things for their masters. But ***whatever they did***, if they did it ***sincerely from the heart and for the Lord***, there would be a ***reward*** for them when Christ returns. And the reward would be in ***proportion*** to their works.

In addition to the reward for loving service, there will also be ***negative consequences for disobedience***. It is difficult to understand this for it is clear from Col. 3: 24 that the reward consists in the ***“reward of the inheritance”***. Our inheritance consists in eternal life, the new heavens and earth in the presence of Christ. Yet in Eph. 6: 8 he says, “knowing that whatever ***good thing*** each one does, ***this*** he will ***receive back*** from the Lord.” Apparently, then, there are ***other individual rewards*** which accompany the inheritance of eternal life, and that **the inheritance encompasses and includes these individual rewards for obedience.** In other words, the ***inheritance*** does not consist ***only*** of eternal life in heaven, but it also includes the individual rewards for services rendered. Some Christians have rendered more service, others less service, but Christ will recognize us for ***everything*** we have done. Here in Ephesians, we learn that there is a ***payback***, a recompense, for the ***good things*** we do in this life, however common and mundane they are—things that even slaves did for their masters.

In 1 Cor. 3: 11-15, Paul speaks of both ***rewards*** and ***punishments*** for teachers or ministers of the gospel. And he specifically says in vv. 14-15, “If any man's work which he has built on it [*i.e. the foundation of the gospel*] remains, he will receive a ***reward***. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer ***loss***; but he himself will be ***saved***, yet so as through fire.” The word for ***reward*** in 1 Cor. 3: 14 is ***misthos*** or “wages”, the same word we find in 1 Cor. 3: 8, “Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but ***each*** will receive his **own reward according to his own labor.**” The phrase, “according to his ***own*** labor” indicates beyond doubt that the rewards for service in the gospel are ***proportionate*** to the labor expended by ***each*** person, the same idea we find in Eph. 6: 8, “knowing that whatever **good thing each one does**, **this** he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” Paul is not speaking of eternal life which can ***never*** be earned.

It is clear from *Ephesians* and *Colossians* that rewards are not limited to Christian *ministry*, but include the work of slaves. *Misthos* is the same word used for *reward* in Matt. 10: 42, “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his *reward*.” Jesus is not speaking of the general reward of eternal life, nor the reward for being a prophet, but the individual reward based upon the simple act of giving a prophet (a “little one”) a cup of cold water. If even something as insignificant as a cup of cold water receives a specific reward from Christ, truly our life’s work, *whatever* it is, will receive a specific reward *if*—and to the *extent*—that it is done for Christ. (cf. also Matt. 20: 8 in which the laborers in the vineyard are given their “wages”, *misthos*).

In 2 Cor. 5: 10 we read, “For *we* must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that *each* one may be *recompensed* for his *deeds* in the body, according to what he has *done*, whether *good or bad*.” The word for *recompensed* (*komizo*) in 2 Cor. 5: 10 is the same Greek work used by Paul in Eph. 6: 8 for *receiving back* that which he has done. Further, the idea of receiving rewards for services rendered is not limited to the Apostle Paul but comes straight from the mouth of the Lord Jesus who says, “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and **WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS**” (Matt. 16: 27). (Notice the plural word, “deeds”, not “deed”, which encompasses *everything* we have done on earth, both good and bad.)

Now it may be difficult to understand how the *believer* can receive the reward of the *inheritance* and at the same time receive the *consequences of the wrong* he has done, but both reward and consequences are a reality since we have both the reward of the inheritance and consequences in the same passage (Col. 3: 24-25). The two verses apply to both slaves and masters because he says that God judges *without partiality*—that is, without partiality to a person whether slave or free (Eph. 6: 9; Col. 3: 23). The final day of judgment will be both a day of joy and a day of fear and trembling as we stand before the throne of Christ.

We don’t know exactly how the final judgment will play out for the believer. Perhaps there will be *rebuke*. *Perhaps there will be the forfeiting of rewards which we would have received had we been more obedient to the Lord in the “little things” He has given us to do*. But one thing is certain: Christ our Lord does not miss anything. There is a *reward* for scrubbing pots and pans, and there are also *consequences* for not scrubbing pots and pans.

There will be believers in heaven who are rewarded far beyond you and me because they were *faithful in the little things* God gave them to do; and some of us, perhaps me, perhaps you, who are rebuked because we were not faithful in a big thing like studying at WTC, preaching and teaching. Any way you want to slice it, *the Christian is not going to get away with disobedience, faithlessness, and laziness* just because he is a Christian. This is why the Apostle Paul appears before the Corinthians *in fear and much trembling* (1 Cor. 2: 3). That’s why he said, “but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9: 27). Disqualified from what—eternal life? No. But disqualified from the rewards given to those who were faithful in their labors. Salvation by works? No. *Rather, the judgment seat of Christ* where every believer will one day stand in fear and trembling and will be evaluated for the deeds done in the body, both good *and* bad.

Conclusion

So, my brothers and sisters in Christ, there you have it—*the what, the how, the who, and the what for?* So then, what are *you* doing with your life? Are you just laying stones one on top of the other without understanding the big picture? Are you still building walls? Or, are you building a cathedral for the glory of God? *Are you free*, or are you *still acting like a slave*? The difference between the two is not in what they do, but in how they do it, who they do it for, and for the reward promised to them for doing it. So then, let us stop acting like slaves and live like free men.

Working for the Lord—The Slave Becomes a Free Man (Continued) ***Col. 3: 22—4:1; Eph. 6: 5-9***

IV. What for? This is the last question answered in our texts.

So far we have explored three questions from our two texts in *Ephesians* and *Colossians*—the What? the How? and the Who?

(1) The ***first question*** asks, “What kind of work can be pleasing to the Lord?” The answer is found in Col. 3: 23, “***Whatever*** you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.” The “whatever” includes ***every form of common labor*** performed by slaves; therefore, ***all labor*** which does not explicitly violate the moral law of God (e.g. selling sex or illegal drugs, contract killing or any number of other sins) can be pleasing to the Lord.

The answer is also found in Eph. 6: 6, “doing ***the will of God*** from the heart.” Imagine that. So many people—some of you, perhaps—are searching for the will of God for your lives, and the answer is staring you right in the face from these two texts. The will of God for you is to ***do something—anything*** as long as you are doing it willingly and heartily for the Lord! But you may say, “That is much too general. I want to know the ***specific*** will of God is for my life.”

But ***I know specifically*** what the will of God is for your lives. Just ask me and I will tell you. Does anyone here wish to know God’s specific will for your life? Thank you for asking. The will of God is for you to ***study*** and make good use of your time here at WTC—to do your very ***best*** that you can do considering the ***abilities*** the good Lord has given you. The will of God is for you to clean the floors, tend the garden, scrub the toilets and dust the books in the library. It is the will of God for you to obey those who are in authority over you and not remove the reserve books out of the library thus stealing time and opportunity from your fellow class-mates. This is the will of God for your lives.

Therefore, the question: ***What*** can be pleasing to the Lord? is not the right question. God has already told us the ***What? Anything*** which agrees with His moral will. The real issue is not in the What? but in the How? the Who? and the What For?

(2) Secondly, the ***How? How can your work be pleasing to God?*** The answer to this question is found in Eph. 6: 5-6, “with fear and trembling, ***in the sincerity of your heart***, as to Christ; ***not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers***, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the ***heart***.” And we said that the fear and trembling is not in reference to your boss on earth but to your boss in heaven, because in Col. 3: 22 we read, “not with ***external*** service, as those who

merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing *the Lord*.” Whatever you do for the Lord, whether witnessing, preaching a sermon, washing dishes, or planting a garden can be pleasing to the Lord if you get the *How?* correct. If your heart is right before God, if your service is *internal* rather than merely *external*, then you have the *How?*

(3) But thirdly, I said that you cannot get the *How?* right unless you get the *Who?* right. *For whom do you work?* Who do you really work for? Who is your boss? The answer to this question is found in Eph. 6: 7, “With good will render service, *as to the Lord*, and not to men.” It is also found in Col. 3: 23, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, *as for the Lord* rather than for men.” We must see all of our labor as labor *for the Lord*, for this is exactly what it is. Paul makes a *radical distinction* in both texts between those who are our masters “according to the flesh” (Eph.) or our masters “on earth” (Col.) with the one who is our Master “*in heaven*”, because he says in Eph. 6: 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.” There are many earthly masters, and then there is *The Master in heaven*. And we know what the Bible says, “You cannot serve *two* masters.” In the final analysis, you can only serve one master *effectively and completely*, and that Master must be Christ.

The *Who?*, then, is Christ Himself, and *if* you are doing your work for Christ and not simply trying to please men, including yourself, you will do your work *energetically, and you will do it well*. And I submitted the question to you: What kind of effort would you give Christ if He personally asked you to clean this floor or to preach a sermon? But this is the question confronting you and me every single day. Every day Christ asks us to do *something*, however big or little it may seem to men or to us, *whatever it is, it is very important to Christ*.

IV. What For?

But now we come to the *What For?* Now some people would say that this question is unnecessary. The *Who?* is all we need. If we are doing our work for the Lord, this gives us all the *incentive and motivation* we need to do our work heartily, energetically, and with superior quality.

Well, I would be inclined to agree with them if it were not for the Bible. But neither one of these texts *concludes* with the *Who?* Both of them *continue* with the *What for?* *What are we working so hard for?*

Notice Eph. 6: 8, “knowing that *whatever good thing* each one does, *this* he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” Also notice Col. 3: 24-25, “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the *consequences of the wrong which he has done*, and that without partiality.” It seems clear, then, that God desires us to have *additional motivation* for obedience *other than* knowing for *Whom* we are working. Apparently, we *need* this additional motivation or God wouldn’t give it to us.

Now, it would take me the entire next semester preaching in all the chapel services to cover adequately all the Scriptural texts concerning the rewards promised to believers for services rendered on earth. There are dozens of passages—OT and NT—which we could press into service for this purpose. But let us look these two passages and a few more from the NT.

Notice in these two texts that both *positive* and *negative* motivation is given. The positive motivation is given in both *Ephesians* and *Colossians*, the negative motivation only in *Colossians*.

Keep carefully in mind the *context* of the passage. Paul is *still speaking* to slaves, and he is telling them that there is a *reward* for cleaning floors, planting and harvesting crops, and washing feet if these tasks are done heartily for the Lord. Furthermore, the reward is in *proportion* to their work, because in *Eph. 6: 8* he says, “knowing that whatever *good thing* each one does, *this* he will receive back from the Lord.”

Our heavenly Father loves *all* His children, and He is not going to put *slaves and common laborers at a disadvantage* to other Christians who are given much greater *social standing and opportunity* in life. When the reward is handed out, no one will say, “Well, I wish I could receive a reward from God, but I never did anything but farming, and there is no reward for farming—or taking care of children, or carpentry, or tending cows. The only reward goes to company executives or heads of state, teachers or preachers.” No. No. Every believer will have the opportunity for receiving a reward, and it is quite possible that slaves will receive a greater reward or more rewards than doctors or heads of state. It all depends on how he goes about his labors and who he is serving while doing them.

But notice also that there are *negative “consequences”* for not cleaning floors and washing feet for the Lord, because he says in Col. 3: 25, “For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the *wrong* which he has done.” What *wrong* is Paul speaking about here? Is he talking about slaves *stealing* from their masters? Is he talking about *destroying* the master’s property or *harming* their masters?

Well, these things are wrong but he is not speaking about such things. Rather, he is still talking about the same subject of v. 23, “*Whatever you do.*” He is talking about *service to their masters*. If they *fail* to do *whatever* service they should do for the Lord, there will be bad consequences because of their failure.

Furthermore, remember that Paul is speaking *only* to *Christian* slaves, those who are in the churches of Ephesus and Colossae. He does not *expect* the proper obedience and attitudes from non-Christian slaves; he isn’t even speaking to them. For *Christian* slaves, there are negative consequences for disobedience, not simply for *external* sinfulness, but for lack of *internal* obedience from the heart. Every Christian can receive a *reward*, but it is also true that every Christian can receive *bad consequences* for doing wrong. It works both ways.

So then, what are we working for? We are working to receive a good thing from the Lord which the Scriptures call a “reward”, and we are working to avoid bad things from the Lord which Paul calls “consequences.”

And this brings up *two more questions from the text: I. What is the reward and what are the negative consequences? And II. When will believers receive these rewards and consequences?* This morning I only have time to deal with one-half of the first question: *What is the reward?* And if I live long enough I will attempt to finish this series next semester.

I. What is the reward?

The first answer to this question comes directly from the text in *Colossians*. The reward mentioned is “the reward of the inheritance” (v. 24). And we all know what the inheritance is, don’t we? The inheritance is *heaven* itself, being *present* with the Lord, the *kingdom of heaven* promised in the Sermon on the Mount; in a word, *salvation*. Right? Therefore, we reason that there is no *other* reward for obedience than *salvation or eternal life*. But this interpretation presents a bit of a *theological* problem, doesn’t it? Eternal life or salvation is a *free* gift. Salvation is by *grace*, not by *works* of obedience. So how can the *reward* be salvation if we can’t *earn* salvation?

Interpreting the inheritance as *salvation* also presents a problem *grammatically* because the word for “reward” in Col. 3: 24 (*antapodosin*) literally means “recompense” or “*pay back*”. Three different forms of the word occur in Lk. 14: 12-14 when Jesus says, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your *repayment*. But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to *repay* you; for you will be *repaid* at the resurrection of the righteous.” A form of the word is also used in Rom. 12: 19, “ ‘Vengeance is mine, I will *repay*,’ says the Lord” and 2 Thes. 1: 6, “For after all it is *only* just for God to *repay* with affliction those who afflict you.”

Therefore, the “reward of the inheritance” in Col. 3: 24, according to the *normal usage* of the word, “reward”, is *payback*. But God doesn’t pay us back for what we do with salvation. Salvation is a free gift of His grace. Now, this begs the question about what our *inheritance* really is. It certainly *includes* salvation, eternal life, but it must include *something else* for which we are being *repaid*.

When we look at *Eph. 6: 8*, we find the same *English* wording, “knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will *receive back* from the Lord, whether slave or free.” The *Greek* word in v. 8 (*komízō*) is *different* from the one in Col. 3: 24, but the translators have rendered the word in the same way, to “*receive back*”. And it is the *same* word used in Col. 3: 25, “For he who does wrong will receive [or “receive back”] the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.”

The same Greek word (*komízō*) is also used in 1 Pet. 1: 9. Reading from v. 8, “and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, *obtaining [or “receiving” KJV, NKJ, ASV]* as the outcome of your *faith* the *salvation* of your souls.” But notice Peter says here that the salvation of our souls is the payback of our *faith, not our obedience or works*, but the *context of Ephesians and Colossians* is payback for *obedience* which is the *result* of faith. There is a difference between *faith* and the *result* of faith or the *goal* of faith which is obedience.

Now, hold your breath a few more minutes because I have one more Greek lesson to give you. In 2 Cor. 5: 10 Paul says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be *recompensed* for his *deeds* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Paul is speaking to *believers*, “For *we* must *all* appear...” The word “*recompensed*” is the same word used in Eph. 6:8 and Col. 3: 25, and it can be rendered “*paid back.*” We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that we may be *paid back* for the deeds in the body, according to what we have *done*, whether *good or bad*. Unlike Peter in 1 Pet. 1: 9, Paul is not talking about a payback for what we have *believed*. He is talking about a payback for what we have *done—good or bad*.

It should be clear that the *good deeds* we have done in 2 Cor. 5: 10 correspond to the “*good thing each one does*” in Eph. 6: 8. Paul wrote both epistles. Furthermore, the *bad deeds* we have done in 2 Cor. 5: 10 correspond to “*the wrong*” which we have done in Col. 3: 25. Just as the believer is *paid back* for good things, he is also *paid back* for wrong things. Furthermore, just as the payback for good things cannot be *salvation*—since salvation is a gift—*the payback for bad deeds cannot be hell because believers do not go to hell*. In 2 Cor.5 Paul is writing to believers. The punishment of unbelievers in hell is not even in the picture but only the punishment of believers who go to heaven.

But we still haven’t answered the question, have we? What are the rewards? We have established the fact, I hope, that the reward of the inheritance is a payback or *repayment for the good we have done in the body during this life* and that it cannot be salvation itself since salvation is not a payback for what we have *done* but a payback for what we have *believed* (1 Pet. 1: 9).

So then, what exactly is the reward in Eph. 6 and Col. 3? And the answer is: *I don’t know*. And you will say, “You don’t know?! You have dragged us through all this Greek just to tell us that you don’t know? And the answer is “Yes, I don’t know.” All I do know is that the reward mentioned in Eph. 6, Col. 3, and 2 Cor. 5 is *something else* besides salvation and eternal life. But for the next few minutes, let me try to explain something about the reward which I *do* know.

A. First, the reward is measured out to us according to the specific deeds we have done on earth during our lifetime.

Paul says, “knowing that whatever *good thing* each one does, *this* he will receive back from the Lord.” But this is not only the teaching of Paul, but also the teaching of the Lord Jesus Himself.

In *Matt. 6: 1-5*, Jesus speaks of a reward for *giving in secret to the poor*. If we do it in secret rather than to be noticed by men and without keeping a mental record of what we do, we have a reward. The reward is presented for the *specific deed* of giving to the poor in secret.

In *Matt. 10: 41-42*, Jesus says, “He who receives a prophet in *the* name of a prophet shall receive a *prophet’s reward*; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a *righteous man’s reward*. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.” The reward is *specifically for any kindness shown to traveling evangelists, prophets, and missionaries* who bring the word of the gospel to distant locations. Showing kindness to God’s servants the prophets was always dangerous in the OT and NT, and God will reward anyone for this *specific* act of kindness.

In **Luke 6: 35** Jesus offers a reward *specifically to those who love their enemies and do good to them*, saying, “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your *reward* will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.” In this verse the word for reward (*misthos*) is the same as that in **Rom. 4: 4**, “Now to the one who works, his *wage [or “reward”]* is not credited as a favor [*charis*, the word for grace], but as what is *due*.” The reward in Lk. 6: 35, then, is a wage which is due the person who earned it.

In Matt. 5: 11-12, Jesus offers a reward *specifically for those who are persecuted for righteousness*, “Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your *reward* in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Again, the word “reward” (*misthos*) is the same as that in Roman 4: 4 and **James 5: 4**, “Behold, the *pay of the laborers* who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” Therefore, the reward of being persecuted for righteousness is a *payback or wages* that are due.

Now *strictly according to the texts*, some of the rewards in the earlier passages in Matt. 6, Matt. 10, and Lk. 6 could apply *only* to rewards in this life. I would *deny* this interpretation, but I would have to admit the possibility strictly on the merits on the texts themselves. However, in the Matt. 5 passage, Jesus specifically says, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward [or wages] *in heaven* is great.” And there can be no denying the fact that many prophets of the OT died *without* receiving any great reward for their sacrifice in *this life*. Jezebel killed many of them (1 Kings 18: 4), and we know specifically of one such prophet who leaves a poor widow begging Elisha for protection against a creditor who demanded her two sons as slaves (2 Kings 4: 1). That poor prophet and his widow will one day receive their reward, but they didn’t receive it while they were still living.

In Matt. 6: 19-21, Jesus says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures *on earth*, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures *in heaven*, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” According to Jesus, treasure is something we can *store up*, something to which we can *add more treasure* from time to time. To the *degree* that we are adding to our storehouse in heaven, our hearts will also be in heaven. To the *degree* that we are storing up treasures on earth, our hearts will gravitate down to the earth, and we will be preoccupied with the things of this earth.

The treasures Jesus is speaking about are *good deeds*. We can store up more and more good deeds in heaven, *but if the treasure we are storing up in heaven is eternal life, how can we store up more eternal life?* Can we get more life than eternal life?

Jesus goes on to say in Matt. 6: 24 that no one can serve two masters—God and money. Therefore, laying up treasures in heaven is all about serving the Master in heaven rather than any earthly master—whether men, or self, or money. So we are right back to Eph. 6 and Col. 3—eyeservice or pleasing men rather than pleasing Christ. We have to choose one or the other because we really can’t serve both effectively.

Now, from the texts we have seen so far, it should come as no surprise to you that the reward given according to specific deeds done in the body is not ***one reward but many rewards*** according to the ***many specific deeds*** that are done. But further, the rewards are given to the ***individuals who have earned them***, not to the ***general assembly*** of all Christians in heaven.

Notice that in ***Eph. 6: 8*** Paul says, “knowing that whatever good thing ***each one*** does, this ***he*** will receive back from the Lord.” It is often argued that the ***commands*** given in the scriptures and the ***rewards for obedience which are attached to them*** belong generally to the church, to ***all*** the saints in heaven. ***We all obey these commands*** and ***we all reap*** the reward of eternal life which is attached to them.

I disagree. According to one scholar (William J. Fuller, quoted in Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, p. 301), “***A command that everyone keeps is superfluous [unnecessary], and a reward everyone receives for a virtue that everyone has is nonsense.***” For example, if I gave everyone in my class an “A” on every test because everyone tried hard, an “A” would soon be meaningless.

Going to a scriptural example, “Don’t store up treasures on earth but in heaven.” If ***every*** Christian were ***consistent*** in keeping this command, it would be ***unnecessary*** for Jesus to tell ***believers*** to store up their treasures in heaven. All of us would be doing it in equal measure. And if every Christian ***shared this priority*** and ***had the same number of treasures stored up in heaven***, the reward ***would be meaningless since everyone in heaven would have it.*** And once again, the treasure cannot be eternal life because you can’t store up eternal life.

Oh, but you may say. “Jesus was addressing believers ***and unbelievers*** in the Sermon. Well, there is no doubt that unbelievers were ***present***, but the Sermon on the Mount is addressed to ***citizens of the kingdom of God.*** “You ***are*** [not will become] the salt of the earth.... You ***are*** [not will become] the light of the world.” Likewise, Jesus wasn’t addressing ***unbelievers*** when He said, “Blessed are you when ***people*** insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you ***because of Me.***” How could this statement apply to an unbeliever? Since when are unbelievers persecuted for Jesus’ sake?

He also recognized that some Christians would be persecuted for righteousness ***more*** than other Christians who would live ***normal lives in peace and safety***, so He offers a ***special reward*** for those who were severely persecuted ***like the OT prophets*** before them (Matt. 5: 11-12). Likewise, the command to store up treasures in heaven is addressed to ***believers*** and some believers are going to store up ***more treasure in heaven*** than other believers. But unbelievers are not storing up treasures in ***heaven***; they’re storing up their treasures on ***earth.*** Jesus wasn’t even addressing unbelievers when He said this. Once again, “***A command that everyone keeps is superfluous [unnecessary], and a reward everyone receives for a virtue that everyone has is nonsense.***”

So then—to repeat the first point—***rewards are measured out to us according to the specific deeds we have done on earth during our lifetime.***

B. Secondly, the rewards given are better than anything we can imagine.

One day a rich man refused to obey Jesus’ command to sell all he had and give to the poor.

Jesus then said it was virtually impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Upon hearing this, and watching the rich man walk away, Peter asked this question, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” (Matt. 19: 27). “What are we going to get out of this?”

We might have expected Jesus to scold Peter for the question. “Peter, you shouldn’t ask such a question! You should serve me without any thought of receiving something in return!” But He doesn’t scold Peter. Instead, He gives him a very frank answer, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive *many times as much, and will inherit eternal life*” (Matt. 19: 28-29). Notice that Jesus says those who have sacrificed these things for His name will receive many times as much *and eternal life*. They are given *in addition to eternal life*.

The parable of the minas in Lk. 19: 11-27 indicates a generous reward for earning ten more minas with the one mina. The man who earns ten more minas will be put in charge of ten cities, and the man who earned five more minas will be put in charge of five cities. We don’t exactly know what this means or whether we should even press the details of this parable, but the general meaning is that God *will more than compensate any of us, all of us, for faithful service on earth*. Turning one mina into ten earns ten cities. Turning one mina into five minas earns five cities. What is going on here? The point is that God owns the whole earth and that His people will inherit this earth. He has far more reward to spread around than we can even imagine.

C. Thirdly, even though we are rewarded according to our works, the rewards themselves are based purely on grace.

This may sound like a contradiction, but it isn’t. We are not rewarded because we, alone, deserve it, but only because God is gracious. God is at work in us to will and to work for His good pleasure, and without the gift of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Holy Spirit, we wouldn’t be able to do anything. All good works are produced by grace, and only God can supply grace. Therefore, whatever works we give to God are given out of His own hand.

Furthermore, *we never do more than we ought to have done and far less*. In the parable of the unworthy servant in Lk. 17: 7-10, Jesus says that the master does not have to thank the slave for the work he commanded the slave to do. He concludes the parable by saying, “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are *unworthy* slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.’”

The parable of the vineyard owner in Matt. 20 is given in response to Peter’s question: “We have left everything and followed you. What then will there be for us.” In the parable some men work twelve hours and receive a denarius. Others work nine hours, still others six, others three and the last group only one hour. But everyone receives the same thing—one denarius. The first men hired get angry about this, but the owner’s response is this, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?”

The parable of the vineyard owner doesn’t contradict the parable of the minas or the parable of the talents which teach *proportionate rewards given to God’s people for what they do according*

to their works. The way Peter had phrased the question seemed to imply that Jesus was somehow *obligated* toward His disciples and this was a dangerous attitude which needed correcting. Jesus assured Peter that a *generous reward* was coming, but the parable of the vineyard owner was presented as a *mild rebuke*. Through the parable Jesus teaches us that our labors in the kingdom *never obligate* God toward us. No matter *how hard* we work, He would never *really* be indebted to us. In the final analysis whatever He gives us is not based on *merit*, but rather on the fact that He is *generous* and wishes to bestow the rewards of grace upon His people.

Application of the Passage

Finally, how do we apply these texts from Eph., Col. and the Gospels? They are all about *incentive and motivation*. God knows that we need the additional incentive of *positive rewards* and *negative consequences* to prod us into action. Today I have only talked about the rewards, and we still don't know exactly *what they are*. But I assure you they are *better* than anything you can possibly imagine. *The payback is far greater than anything you or I could ever do.* God is a generous God, and He delights in rewarding His children for *expending* themselves, for *sacrificing* themselves, for *valuing His kingdom* above anything else in this life.

And if every Christian received the *same thing*—eternal life and nothing but eternal life—there would be *few Christians running the race to win the prize*. And this is *my concern*. Too many believers in this world are *sitting on their butts waiting to go to heaven*. Some people waiting to go to heaven are not true believers, but many *are* who are just sitting around with very little vision for what *they* could accomplish for the kingdom of God.

And what is the result? The church is weak. The Great Commission has not yet been fulfilled and millions upon millions are dying and going to hell each year. “Yes, but God is *sovereign* and He will accomplish all His pleasure.” Yes, but *we are responsible* to obey Him in all things, and to seek *first* the kingdom of God, but we fail miserably in doing so.

And when Christ returns, the *When question* which I couldn't get to, many Christians will *miss out* on the *eternal rewards* they would have received but don't receive had they been *fully and totally* committed to Christ. In fact, *we all* will experience some sense of loss at the *judgment seat of Christ* when we discover what we *compare* what we *actually* accomplished with what we *could* have accomplished by the grace of God.