

+ Colossians 3:17-24 + Who Do You Work For? + 5th Sunday After Pentecost + 5 July 2009 +

Who do you work for? During these challenging economic times, that's really an interesting question. For many, that question is tough to answer because they're out of work. For many of you, the answer comes right to mind though. "I work for so-and-so." For others, you might answer, "Well, before I retired, I worked for so-and-so." For those of you too young for a job, you might say, "I'm not working for anybody yet...Maybe Mom or Dad?"

Who do you work for? Yes, it's an interesting question, but worth our consideration, because it impacts every one of us. You see, no matter how young or old, how active or not so much, every Christian works for somebody. Now if you don't have a job, you might ask, "...But who?" In the lesson before us, St. Paul has the answer, but it's much more than a job.

You see, Paul was writing to a group of people just like the one sitting here. There were husbands and wives, widows and widowers, and the unmarried. There were moms and dads and sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, young and old. There were slaves and masters. Yes, Paul lived during a time when slavery was a reality in Roman society. There was much about it, though, that applies to today's workplace with employers and employees. I'm sure there were some there who were in a sense retired. Even the city of Colossae was similar to ours. It had once been a great city on a major trading route, but by the time Paul wrote his letter, the city had diminished to a market town surpassed in importance by much larger neighboring cities.

To these people like us, Paul has a lot to say about work and service and knowing who you work for, but only a couple verses actually talk about business. So what kind of work, what kind of service is Paul talking about here in Colossians 3? He's talking about what we call "vocation", literally our "calling". Every one of us has one or more of these vocations or callings from God to serve our neighbor, which could be as a spouse, parent, child, sibling, employer, employee, church member, or pastor serving that person or persons whom God has chosen to bless us through our service.

There's one more thing, though, for Christians like us serving in our different vocations in the home, community, and church. Remember who you work for, who you really serve. Paul explains, "**It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**" Now that puts a whole different spin on the question, "Who do you work for?", because sometimes you and I forget that.

When we read Paul's words, they can be awfully troubling when we consider how God has called us to serve him. Paul says, "**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.**" Has every word, every action been done in grateful thanks to Jesus? Would people always be able to tell you're a servant of Christ by the words you use or the things you do?

Paul explains how that is to play out in marriage. "**Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.**" Wives, that word "**submit**" can seem so offensive, right? No one's going to make you "**submit**" to anyone, but Paul's not forcing anyone here. Instead, he's reminding wives to serve in their God-given calling as supportive helpers to their husbands, who have their own calling. A husband is not to be lord and master over the marriage, but the loving, self-sacrificing leader, whose love is to reflect the gentle, compassionate, self-sacrificing love of Christ for his Church. Husbands, how often have you forgotten your role as loving leader of the family? Wives, how often have you forgotten your role as supportive helper of your husband? When you both forget whom you serve, what happens?

It's no better in the family. "**Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.**" Kids, when your mom or dad tell you to clean your room or do your homework or stop fighting with your sibling, how often do you happily and willingly listen to them? How often do you forget that you serve Jesus when you listen to mom and dad? Parents, how often have you either let the kids have whatever they want or disciplined them too hard? Dads, how much of a role have you taken not only in the discipline of your kids, but in their spiritual growth? Parents, how often have you forgotten whom you serve and failed to set a proper example for your children or grumbled about the holy calling in which God has placed you?

We see it in the workplace too. Yes, Paul is talking to slaves and masters in our text, but what he has to say applies to employees and employers too. Employees, how often have you forgotten whom you really serve and slacked off when the boss wasn't watching or grumbled about the work you had to do? Employers, have you

always been fair to your employees? Maybe you're single or a retiree or a church member or a citizen. How often have you forgotten whom you serve in your holy callings?

So often you and I think we know who we work for, but it isn't God. No, you and I get fooled into thinking we work for ourselves. It's all about me. It's all about you. It's all about how I want to lead in marriage. It's all about what I want to do, what I want for the church or how much I want to work. You and I are so naturally drawn to thinking about ourselves and putting ourselves first that we forget who we actually work for. Such self-centeredness leads to ugliness in a marriage, miscommunication in a family, poor effort in the workplace, and half-hearted service in the church. When it's all about you or all about me, pretty soon we're left alone with the ugliness of death and hell.

“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.” Those words just condemn our hearts when we look at them through the lens of vocation, but those words also remind us there was One who never forgot whom he served. There was One who never grumbled about the holy callings he had, especially that of Suffering Servant. There was One who served perfectly as son in the home and brother in the family, as citizen and teacher in the community, as member in the synagogue, and as Savior on the cross. That One, of course, was the Lord Jesus.

He had holy callings, too. Remember that Jesus was ***“born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law...”*** Remember that Jesus had the highest calling—that of Savior of the world—which was lined out for him through 39 books of the Old Testament. That calling included lowliness, humility, poverty, suffering, pain, sorrow, shame, and finally death by crucifixion. Never once, though, did he regret or grumble or shy away from the opportunity to serve. From his conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin to his lowly birth in a stable to his innocent death on the cross to his triumphant victory o'er the grave, Jesus never forgot who he worked for—serving us, his undeserving enemies, to serve his heavenly Father. All along Jesus knew why he was serving—to bring us life and light and freedom from all that guilt, to place his holy name on us so our service would be pleasing to our holy God. Christ is the One for whom we give thanks to God the Father and through whom we can look forward to eternal life in heaven.

When you realize you work for Christ and realize he has placed his holy name on you as his dear child, it changes everything. If Christ's name is to be on all of your service, every word and every deed, it changes everything in the marriage, in the family, in the workplace, in the community, in the church. It changes your attitude about serving as Paul says, ***“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”***

Christ, then, helps you to give thanks in all things as a supportive helper or loving leader in marriage, as a caring parent or obedient child or loving sibling in the family, as a faithful employee or fair employer or model retiree, as a faithful citizen and a self-sacrificing church member, as a contented child of God. He helps you to give thanks for all things—the roof over your head, the clothes on your back, the food on your table, the money in your account, the opportunity to serve your neighbor, the Savior to share, all because he has so graciously given them to you. Christ helps you to see that service to your neighbor is service to him, so why hesitate when it comes to using your time, your talents, or your treasures in his service?

Through the faith created in your heart at Holy Baptism and through the Word of God, you know who you work for whatever your holy calling might be. ***“It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”*** So let's spend all our days for Christ with grateful thanks, strengthened by his Word and longing for the unseen glory of eternal life in heaven. What a privilege we have to be called servants of Christ! May that blessed reality motivate us every day as we sing in the hymn, ***“Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days; Let them flow in ceaseless praise. Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.”*** Amen.