

Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 16
Colossians 3:22-4:1 : Topic 07.3
“Slaves and Masters in the Family”

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Greek NT

3.22 οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε κατὰ πάντα τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις, μὴ ἐν ὄφθαλμοδουλίαις, ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀπλότητι καρδίας, φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον. 23 ὃ ἔὰν ποιῆτε, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, 24 εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας· τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε. 25 ὃ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὁ ἡδίκησεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολημψία.

4.1 οἱ κύριοι, τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἰσότητα τοῖς δούλοις παρέχεσθε, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ.

La Biblia
de las Américas

3.22 Siervos, obedeced en todo a vuestros amos en la tierra, no para ser vistos, como los que quieren agradar a los hombres, sino con sinceridad de corazón, temiendo al Señor. 23 Y todo lo que hagáis, hacedlo de corazón, como para el Señor y no para los hombres, 24 sabiendo que del Señor recibiréis la recompensa de la herencia. Es a Cristo el Señor a quien servís. 25 Porque el que procede con injusticia sufrirá las consecuencias del mal que ha cometido, y eso, sin acepción de personas.

4.1 Amos, tratad con justicia y equidad a vuestros siervos, sabiendo que vosotros también tenéis un Señor en el cielo.

NRSV

3.22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.

4.1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

NLT

3.22 You slaves must obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Obey them willingly because of your reverent fear of the Lord. 23 Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 24 Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and the Master you are serving is Christ. 25 But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites who can get away with evil.

4.1 You slave owners must be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master -- in heaven.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

This third unit of the Haustafeln material, 3:18-4:1, treats the final segment of the ancient family, the slaves² and their relationship to the male head of the household. This discussion is particularly significant, not

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the ‘then’ meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the ‘now’ meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²The Greek words in the New Testament primarily are *doulos* [slave], *sýndoulos* [fellow slave], *doulé* [female slave], *douleúō* [to be a slave], *douleia* [slavery], *doulóō* [to enslave], *katadoulóō* [to enslave], *doulagōgéō* [to enslave], *ophthalmodoulia* [eye-service] = δοῦλος, σύνδουλος, δούλη, δουλέω, δουλεία, δουλώ, καταδουλώ, δουλαγωγέω, ὄφθαλμοδουλία. These terms are all built from the δουλ- stem as derivatives. Additional terms alluding to slaves found in the New Testament include παιδίσκη [female slave], οἰκέτης [house slave], ἀνδραποδιστής [slave dealer]. Well over a hundred references to slaves surface inside the New Testament. Several individual slaves are mentioned specifically in the New Testament: “Slaves (Gk. *doulos*) mentioned in the NT include

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only in light of the parallel in Eph. 6:5-9,³ but also in that the entire letter of Philemon⁴ about the run away slave Onesimus was sent to Colossae where Philemon lived. The letter to Philemon was publicly read before the house church groups in the Lycus Valley as well as Colossians and Ephesians. Thus these three letters are especially interconnected with one another on this particular topic, and should be studied in relation to one another.

Onesimus (Phlm. 10–21), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27–39), the maid Rhoda (12:13–15), the clairvoyant slave girl of Philippi (16:16–24), the Roman centurion’s slave (Luke 7:1–10 = Matt. 8:5–13), and slaves of the high priest Caiaphas (Mark 14:47, 66–69 par.)” [J. Albert Harrill, “Slave” In , in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1232.]

³**Eph. 6:4-9 NRSV:** 5 **Slaves**, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; 6 not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, 8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

9 And, **masters**, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

5 Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ, 6 μὴ κατ’ ὄφθαλμοδυνλίαν ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι ἀλλ’ ὡς δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ ποιοῦντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐκ ψυχῆς 7 μετ’ εὐνοίας δουλεύοντες, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, 8 εἰδότες ὅτι ἔκαστος, ὃ ἂν ποιήσῃ ἀγαθόν, τοῦτο κομίσεται παρὰ κυρίου, εἴτε δοῦλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος.

9 Καὶ οἱ κύριοι, τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς, ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ὑμῶν ὁ κύριος ἔστιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ προσωπολημγία οὐκ ἔστιν παρ’ αὐτῷ.

⁴**Philemon NRSV:** 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God 5 because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. 7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother. 8 For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, 9 yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. 13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. 15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. 20 Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 22 One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1.1 Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν 2 καὶ Ἀπφίᾳ τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Αρχίπῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ’ οἰκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ· 3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

4 Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε μνείαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, 5 ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀγίους, 6 ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργής γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν· 7 χαρὰν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον καὶ παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου, ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἀγίων ἀναπέπαυται διὰ σοῦ, ἀδελφέ.

8 Διό, πολλὴν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον, 9 διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ, τοιοῦτος ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ — 10 παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς Ὁνήσιμον, 11 τόν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστόν, 12 ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι αὐτόν, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα· 13 ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβούλομην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν κατέχειν, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῇ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 14 χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς γνώμης οὐδὲν ἡθέλησα ποιῆσαι, ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ἢ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἑκούσιον· 15 τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὅραν ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς, 16 οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν, μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσῳ δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ.

17 Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ· 18 εἰ δέ τι ἡδίκησέν σε ἡ ὄφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα· 19 ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω· ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοι ὅτι καὶ σεαυτόν μοι προσοφεύλεις. 20 ναί, ἀδελφέ, ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ. 21 πεποιθὼς τῇ ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψα σοι, εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπέρ ἡλέγω ποιήσεις. 22 ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοίμαζε μοι ἔσειν, ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

23 Ασπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 24 Μᾶρκος, Αρίσταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου.

25 Η χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

Additionally, in the remainder of the New Testament this segment of the Haustafeln surfaces in other places, especially in 1 Tim. 6:1-2⁵ and 1 Peter 2:18-25.⁶ The contrasting dual world of early Christianity posed particular challenges. Spiritually, slavery was abolished and was to play no role inside the community of believers, as Col. 3:11⁷ and Gal. 3:27-28⁸ make very clear. Paul both assumes and encourages slaves to seek their freedom; cf. 1 Cor. 7:21.⁹ Yet, believers lived in a social and legal system where slavery was legal and widely practiced,¹⁰ and to advocate the social and legal abolishment of slavery would have brought the severest of penalties. The challenge to early Christian leaders

was to balance these two conflicting dynamics together in a way that furthered the spread of the Gospel through out the Roman empire. Our passage then emerges out of that first century challenge and addresses Christians who both were slaves and were slave owners.

One of the primary interpretation questions here is how to appropriately apply this passage to the modern world. Although slavery unfortunately still exists in isolated parts of today's world, for the most part, slavery has been abolished and stands universally condemned as unacceptable in our time. Thus, how should we

⁵**1 Tim. 6:1-2a NRSV:** 1 Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. 2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.

6.1 Ὅσοι εἰσὶν ὑπὸ ζυγὸν δοῦλοι, τοὺς ιδίους δεσπότας πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους ἡγείσθωσαν, ἵνα μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία βλασφημῆται. 2 οἱ δὲ πιστοὺς ἔχοντες δεσπότας μὴ καταφρονείτωσαν, ὅτι ἀδελφοί εἰσιν· ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον δουλευέτωσαν, ὅτι πιστοί εἰσιν καὶ ἀγαπητοὶ οἱ τῆς εὐεργεσίας ἀντίλαμβανόμενοι.

⁶**1 Peter 2:18-25 NRSV:** 18 Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. 19 For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20 If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

18 Οἱ οἰκέται ὑποτασσόμενοι ἐν παντὶ φόβῳ τοῖς δεσπόταις, οὐ μόνον τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς καὶ ἐπιεικέσιν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς σκολιοῖς. 19 τοῦτο γὰρ χάρις εἰ διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ ὑποφέρει τις λύπας πάσχων ἀδίκως· 20 ποιὸν γὰρ κλέος εἰ ἀμαρτάνοντες καὶ κολαφίζομενοι ὑπομενεῖτε; ἀλλ' εἰ ἀγαθοποιοῦντες καὶ πάσχοντες ὑπομενεῖτε, τοῦτο χάρις παρὰ θεῷ. 21 εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκλήθητε, ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ὑμῖν ὑπολιμπάνων ὑπογραμμὸν ἵνα ἐπακολουθήστε τοῖς ἔχνεσιν αὐτοῦ· 22 δὲ ὃς ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ εὑρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ· 23 δὲ λοιδορούμενος οὐκ ἀντελοιδόρει, πάσχων οὐκ ἡπειρει, παρεδίδου δὲ τῷ κρίνοντι δικαίως· 24 δὲ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ἔιλον, ἵνα ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ἀπογενόμενοι τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ζήσωμεν· οὐ τῷ μωλωπὶ ιάθητε. 25 ἡτε γὰρ ὡς πρόβατα πλανώμενοι, ἀλλὰ ἐπεστράφητε νῦν ἐπὶ τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν.

⁷**Col. 3:11 NRSV:** *In that renewal there is no longer* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, *slave and free*; but Christ is all and in all!

εἰς ἐπτύγωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν, 11 ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι Ἑλλην καὶ Ιουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

⁸**Gal. 3:27-28 NRSV:** 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, *there is no longer slave or free*, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

27 ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε· 28 οὐκ ἔνι Ιουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἑλλην, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ιησοῦ. 29 εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι.

⁹**1 Cor. 7:21 NRSV:** Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever.

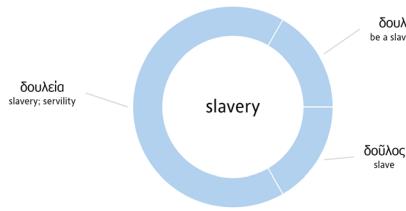
21 Δοῦλος ἐκλήθης; μή σοι μελέτω· ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μᾶλλον χρῆσαι.

[The εἰ καὶ assumes the gaining of freedom.]

¹⁰Roughly one third or more of the population of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era were slaves.



ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SLAVES



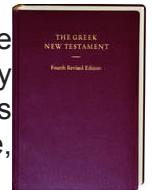
take a text addressing the ancient situation of slavery and apply it to our world? The principles of biblical interpretation insist on finding a way to link the concepts of scripture to today's world, on the premise of the Bible standing a sacred scripture and thus as the divine revelation of the will of God for all time. Commonly this passage in the Haustafeln and related texts are seen as relevant to the market place. Thus slave becomes employee and master stands as employer. Perhaps this is the best linkage, although the principle of historical criticism underscores that the closer the cultural situation between the exegesis of the text and the contemporary application world the more certain one can be in applying a text. The greater the gap between the then and now worlds of the text the less certain the application. Making a cultural shift from the family to the market place in the interpretive process represents a significant shift. The justification for this may -- in part at least -- be the economic basis for slavery in the ancient world. Slavery was essential to the economy of ancient Rome at the beginning of the Christian era. But making such an interpretive shift must acknowledge that any concluded timeless truths for application to our world become less certain and more subjective. If closer connections to the 'then' and 'now' meanings surface where the cultural gap is lessened, the more confidence we can have in the understood 'now' meaning of the text.



ROMAN PRISONERS TAKEN AS SLAVES

Historical Context:

External History. In the history of the hand copying of the Greek text of this passage the editors of the United Bible Society *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) did not detect any variations of wording significant enough to impact the translation of this passage. Some variations in wording are present in the several thousand ancient copies of the Greek text of this passage, however. But they do not reflect significant shifts in meaning of the ideas found in the passage.



The Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev ed.) reflects in its text apparatus the variations of wording present in this passage.¹¹ But as close examination of the variations reveal, these changes are stylistic and not cognitive which would change the text meaning.



Kolosser 3,22

* P⁴⁶ 075. 0278. 81. 1241^s pc vg^{mss} sa (κατὰ πάντα is omitted by these manuscripts)

*† λιας κ C Ψ 0278. 33^{vid}. 1739. 1881 M sy^h; Cl (The locative singular ὄφθαλμοδουλίᾳ is replaced by the locative plural spelling ὄφθαλμοδουλίαις stressing concrete expressions of ὄφθαλμοδουλίᾳ)

| txt P⁴⁶ A B D F G 075. 81. 104. 365. 1241^s al co

* θεον P⁴⁶ κ² D² M d vg^{cl} (κύριον is replaced with θεόν)

| txt κ² A B C D² F G L Ψ 048. 075. 0278. 33. 81. 365. 1175. 1241^s. 1505. 1739. 1881. 2464 al it vg^{st,ww} sy co; Cl

Kolosser 3,23

* καὶ (—κ² 075. 0278) παν o κ² 075. 0278. 104. 326 pc sy^o; Cl (ο̄ is replaced by καὶ, καὶ πᾶν ο̄, or καὶ πᾶν ο̄ τι)

| καὶ (—Ψ 1505) παν o τι D¹ Ψ M (sy^h)

| txt P⁴⁶ κ² A B C D² F G 33. 81. 365. 1175. 1241^s. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc

* (E 6,7) δουλευοντες A 075 pc; Cl (the participle δουλευοντες is added after τῷ κυρίῳ)

* P⁴⁶ B 1739; Ambst (καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις is omitted)

Kolosser 3,24

* λη—P46 κ² A C2 Ψ 075. 0278. 1739. 1881 m (the singular ἀπολήῃ spelling replaces the plural ἀπολήμψεσθε)

| txt κ² B C^{vid} D F G 33. 629. 1175 pc; Cl

* τον κυριου ημων Ιησου Χριστου, φ F G (ar d m*) (bopt); (Ambst) (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ, φ replaces τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ)

* γαρ D¹ Ψ 075 M sy; Cl (γαρ is inserted after τῷ and before κυρίῳ)

| txt P⁴⁶ κ² A B C D² F G 0278. 33. 81. 365. 1175. 1241^s. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc

Kolosser 3,25

* (E 6,9) παρα τω θεω F G I 629 it vg^{cl}; Ambst Pel Cass (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ is inserted after προσωπολημψίᾳ)

Kolosser 4,1

* —νοις κ² D F G Ψ 075 m it vg^{mss} sy^h bo^{pt}; Ambst Spec (the singular οὐρανῷ is replaced by the plural οὐρανοῖς)

| txt κ² A B C I 0278. 33. 81. 104. 326. 1241^s. 1739. 1881 pc lat sa bo^{pt}; Cl

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 529.]

Consequently, we can exegete the adopted reading of the Greek text with full confidence that it reflects the wording originally composed by the writers of this letter.

Internal History. Slavery in the ancient world stands as the historical backdrop to this passage. The condition of slaves in the first Christian century varied according to the ethnic group possessing slaves. Greek slaves tended to be somewhat better off with stricter regulations governing their status and treatment. Hebrew slaves were also governed by strict regulations of the Torah. Roman slaves were regulated by Roman law but tended to be worse off than most other slaves.¹²

Sources of slavery. At the beginning of the Christian era most slaves came from defeated enemies on the battlefield, and had little or no ethnic orientation, unlike slavery in more modern times which typically has a racial or ethnic basis. Amazingly, many people ‘sold themselves into slavery’ in order to gain a better, more stable life. The lot of the peasant in the first century world often was much more precarious than that of the slave. Many other sources for producing slaves existed in the ancient world of the Old Testament.¹³ In New Testament times, the situation was similar.¹⁴

¹²“The Israelites made a deliberate attempt to safeguard the slave from brutality by a master or overseer. By law a maimed slave must be released (Ex 21:26, 27). The few Hebrew slaves in a household frequently toiled alongside their masters in the fields, and they and household slaves often had a reasonable and secure existence, compared with the threat of starvation and destitution of the poorest free men.

In Greek and especially in Roman times, when the number of slaves increased dramatically, household slaves remained the best treated. Many became servants and confidants; some even established good businesses to their own and their masters’ benefit.” [Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 1971-72. S.V., “Slave, Slavery.”]

¹³*b. Sources of slaves in the Old Testament*

“(i) *By capture.* Captives, especially prisoners of war, were commonly reduced to slavery (Gn. 14:21, claimed by the king of Sodom; Nu. 31:9; Dt. 20:14; 21:10ff.; Jdg. 5:30; 1 Sa. 4:9 (cf. RSV); 2 Ki. 5:2; 2 Ch. 28:8, 10ff.), a custom that goes back as far as written documents themselves, to roughly 3000 BC and probably further (references in I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, 1949, pp. 1–3).

“(ii) *By purchase.* Slaves could readily be bought from other owners or general merchants (cf. Gn. 17:12–13, 27; Ec. 2:7). The law allowed Hebrews to buy foreign slaves from foreigners at home or abroad (Lv. 25:44f.). In antiquity, slaves were sold among all kinds of other merchandise and from country to country. Thus, the Midianites and Ishmaelites sold Joseph to an Egyptian high official (Gn. 37:36; 39:1), and Phoenician Tyre imported slaves and bronzeware from Asia Minor (Ezk. 27:13) and sold Jews to the Ionians, thereby incurring a threat of like treatment of her own nationals (Joel 3:4–8). For evidence of the large numbers of Semitic slaves that reached Egypt in Joseph’s general period, probably mainly by trade, see references in Joseph or in Bibliography below. For Babylonian merchant-enterprise in slave-trading abroad in places such as Tyre, see Mendelsohn, op.cit., pp. 3–5.

“(iii) *By birth.* Children ‘born in the house’ of slave-parents became ‘house-born slaves’; such are mentioned in Scripture from patriarchal times onward (Gn. 15:3; 17:12–13, 27; Ec. 2:7; Je. 2:14), and equally early in Mesopotamian documents (Mendelsohn, pp. 57–58).

“(iv) *As restitution.* If a convicted thief could not make restitution and pay his fines and damages, funds towards this could be raised by selling him as a slave (Ex. 22:3; cf. a similar provision in Hammurapi’s Code, §§ 53–54: ANET, p. 168).

“(v) *By default on debts.* Debtors who went bankrupt were often forced to sell their children as slaves, or their children would be confiscated as slaves by the creditor (2 Ki. 4:1; Ne. 5:5, 8). The insolvent debtor himself, as well as his wife and family, commonly became the slave of his creditor and gave him his labour for 3 years to work off the debt and then go free, in Hammurabi’s Code (§ 117: DOTT, p. 30, or ANET, pp. 170–171). This seems to be the background to the Mosaic law in Ex. 21:2–6 (and 7–11), and in Dt. 15:12–18, where a Hebrew slave must work 6 years, explicitly a ‘double’ period of time (Dt. 15:18) compared with Hammurabi’s 3 years (cf. Mendelsohn, pp. 32–33), but on release he was to be granted stock to start up on his own again (see also d. (i) 1, below). Insolvency was a major cause of reduction to slave status in the biblical East (Mendelsohn, pp. 23, 26–29).

“(vi) *Selling oneself voluntarily into slavery,* i.e. dependence on another, to escape poverty, was widely known (Mendelsohn, pp. 14–19, for data). Lv. 25:39–43, 47ff., recognized this, but provided for redemption at (or with foreign owners, even before) Jubilee year.

“(vii) *Abduction.* To steal a person, and to reduce a kidnapped person to slavery, was an offence punishable by death in the laws of both Hammurabi (§ 14: DOTT, p. 30; ANET, p. 166) and Moses (Ex. 21:16; Dt. 24:7). The brothers of Joseph were guilty of essentially such an offence (Gn. 37:27–28 with 45:4), and might well be ‘dismayed’ and need reassurance not to be ‘distressed’ (Gn. 45:3, 5, and cf. Gn. 50:15.”

[D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1110–14. S.V., “Slave, Slavery in the Old Testament,” by K.A. Kitchen]

¹⁴“The main sources of slavery were: (1) birth, depending on the law of the particular state concerning the various degrees of servile parentage; (2) the widespread practice of exposing unwanted children, who were then available for the use of anyone who cared to rear them; (3) the sale of one’s own children into slavery; (4) Voluntary slavery as a solution to problems such as debt; (5) penal slavery; (6) kidnapping and piracy; (7) the traffic across the Roman frontiers. Not all these sources were open in one place at any one time: there was a great deal of variation in local law and sentiment. The degree of slavery also varied greatly, and is impossible to calculate. It may have reached one-third of the population in Rome and the great metropolitan cities of the east. In areas

Status of slaves. In Roman society slaves would not be particularly distinguishable in public from free men.¹⁵ No distinctive dress was required for slaves. Roman slaves were often well educated, and could own property on their own. They occupied a wide range of occupations, both in public and in private.¹⁶ In general they were free from extreme abuse by their owners, although exceptions certainly were present.¹⁷

Yet, one must remember that a slave was -- and is -- a slave, that is, a piece of property that another human being owns. The loss of freedom and often of dignity were severe blows to the human dignity of an individual. Most slaves in ancient Rome eagerly sought their independence, i.e., manumission, especially so in Rome since this meant gaining Roman citizenship.¹⁸

Into this world came the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. In our world we have difficulty grasping how degrading such a status in society might be. We often experience lack of respect in the work place and elsewhere because of the arrogance and pseudo-superiority of some people. But to be legally considered as a non-person with few rights and no legal status is another matter entirely.

Literary Aspects:

The literary elements of the passage again play an important role in the interpretive process.

Literary Form. At the **broad genre** level, 3:22-4:1 is a part of the letter body, which implies the occasional

where there was a peasant economy, however, it was reduced to a small fraction of that.” [D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1110-14. S.V., “Slave, Slavery in the New Testament,” by E.A. Judge.]

¹⁵ “The extent of the owner’s control over the life, the production, the ‘family’ (a slave had no legal kin in Greek and Roman law), and the potential freedom of the enslaved person varied greatly. And sufficient differences existed among the three traditions (Jewish, Greek, and Roman) relevant to NT texts to require that serious students investigate the specific legal-social-philosophical background of each NT passage. This article seeks to reduce that great amount and complexity of detail to balanced examples and appropriate generalizations.

“For example, the Greek tradition tended to regard an enslaved person as inferior by nature and thus fortunate to have a Greek master (Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, echoed by Cicero), and to view human freedom as divisible into parts. The Jewish tradition, despite the practice of debt-slavery and the use of slaves even in the Jerusalem Temple, tended to regard any enslavement of Jews by Jews as improper because every Jew had already become exclusively a ‘slave of God’ by means of the liberation of his or her ancestors from Egyptian bondage (Lev 25:55). In the Roman tradition, slaves on the one hand were rigorously regarded in much legislation as things (*instrumentum vocale*—a ‘speaking tool’), yet on the other hand they were regularly treated as well as free human beings and were normally granted Roman citizenship when set free, as happened regularly. For this reason, it has been argued that urban and domestic enslavement under Roman law is best understood as a process rather than a permanent condition, a process of social integration of outsiders (Wiedemann 1981:3).

[S. Scott Bartchy, “Slavery: New Testament” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 66.]

¹⁶ “Domestic and public slavery were the most widespread forms. In the former case the slaves were purchased and employed as an index of wealth. Where only one or two were owned, they worked beside their master at the same occupations. At Athens they were indistinguishable in the streets from free men, and the familiarity of slaves towards their owners was a stock theme of comedy. At Rome the great houses employed scores of slaves for sheer luxury. Their work was highly specialized and often largely effortless. In the case of public slaves, their status conferred a good deal of independence and respect. They performed all sorts of duties in the absence of a civil service, including even police services in some cases. Professions such as medicine or education were commonly filled by slaves.” [D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1110-14. S.V., “Slave, Slavery in the New Testament,” by E.A. Judge]

¹⁷ “The condition of slavery was everywhere being steadily mitigated in NT times. Although slaves had no legal personality, owners recognized that they worked better the more their condition approximated to freedom, and the owning of property and contracting of marriages were normally allowed. Cruelty was condemned by the growing sentiment of common humanity, and in some cases legally controlled; in Egypt, for instance, the death of a slave was subject to a coroner’s inquest. While in Gk. states emancipated slaves became resident aliens of their former master’s city, at Rome they automatically became citizens on manumission. Thus the vast flow of slaves into Italy, especially during the last 2 centuries before Christ, had the effect of internationalizing the Roman republic, anticipating the government’s own policy of steadily broadening membership.” [D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1110-14. S.V., “Slave, Slavery in the New Testament,” by E.A. Judge]

¹⁸ “Manumission could be readily arranged at any time if owners wished. In Rome it was most commonly performed by testament, and limits had to be placed on the generosity of owners to prevent the too rapid dilution of the citizen body with persons of foreign extraction. In Gk. states 2 common forms were a type of self-purchase, in which the legal incompetence of the slave was overcome by the ownership technically passing to a god, and manumission in return for a contract of services which simply meant that the slave continued in the same employment though legally free.” [D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1110-14. S.V., “Slave, Slavery in the New Testament,” by E.A. Judge]

nature of the material. This is further confirmed by comparison to the parallel passage in Eph. 6:5-9, that although similar in many ways is also significantly different from the Colossians text. Each discussion is framed in ways the apostle thought most appropriate to his targeted readers with each letter. Given also the reality that both letters would be read at Colossae, the differences are stylistic as well. Paul was concerned with ideas, not with individual words. Thus, the same essential idea was presented in different ways.

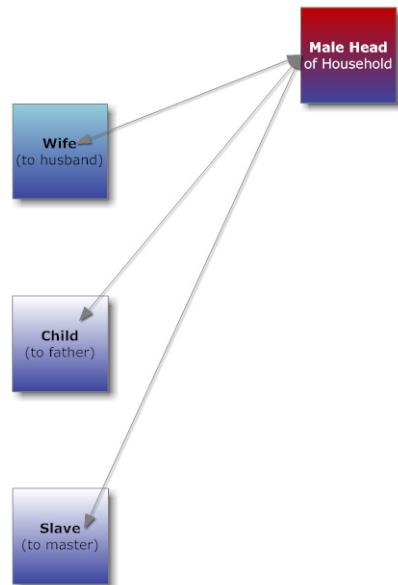
At the **small genre** level, 3:22-4:1 is paraenesis, and in particular Haustafeln paraenesis. The moral admonition nature of the text seeks to address a distinctive way of living for believers in Christ. This grows out of the foundational admonitions in 3:1-4 to seek the things above, and not the earthly things. Thus one's faith in Christ impacts even these social relationships inside the ancient family. The text applied to a variety of situations where both slave and master were believers, as well as only when one side was a believer.

Literary Setting. As is illustrated by the outline of Colossians on the right, 3:22-4:1 stands in a variety of relationships that play an important role in the interpretive process. In the broader context, the passage is a part of the letter body. Next, it is a part of the paraenesis section of 3:1-4:6. Also, it is the third element of the Haustafeln instruction on family relationships in 3:18-4:1. To be noted as well is the tone of worship of God that surrounds the Haustafeln material in 3:16-17 and 4:2-6.

Consequently in seeking to understand the text the impact of this context should be given full consideration. Paul isn't laying down a new Torah of God here. Instead, he is encouraging Christian slaves and Christian slave owners to adopt a distinctive way of relating to one another. The radical nature of this comes to the surface through comparing Paul's discussion with the secular discussions found in the surrounding Greco-Roman society. And even in comparison with the rather strict, but humane regulations for slaves in the Law of Moses. The outstanding example of how Paul intended these guidelines to be implemented can be seen in part through a careful study of the Letter to Philemon, which was also addressed to a Christian slave owner who was a leader in the Christian community at Colossae as well.

When studied against this backdrop along with the emphasis upon equality in Col. 3:11 and Gal. 3:28 and together with the encouragement of slaves to seek their freedom in 1 Cor. 7:21, one can only conclude that the apostle was wisely laying the foundations for a new day in which slavery would not longer exist. But given the prevailing circumstances of that day, open advocacy of abolishing slavery immediately would have only brought severe suffering upon both slaves and slave owners. The better alternative was then for believers to live out their faith commitment in positive relationships and witness even as slaves and slave owners. Inside the believing community these social distinctions would vanish and the church could then model to the rest of the world a new humanity, redeemed by the grace of God.

Ancient Family: Haustafeln Ephesians, Colossians, First Peter



Outline of Colossians

Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2
Superscriptio: 1:1
Adscriptio: 1:2a
Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

Intercession: 1:9-12
Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20
Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul's Ministry 1: 1:24-29
Paul's Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15
Christian Living 2: 2:16-19
Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4
Christian Behavior: 3:5-11
Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1
Husband/Wife: 3:18-19
Father/Children: 3:20-21
Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9
Greetings: 4:10-17
Closing: 4:18
Letter Validation: 4:18a
Prayer Request: 4:18b
Benedictio: 4:19c

Literary Structure:

The block diagram of the original Greek text visually presents the inner connectedness of the thoughts within the passage. The rather literal English translation presented below highlights this from the translation aspect.

3.22 Slaves,
47 **obey your human masters,**
 in everything,
 not with eye-service,
 as men pleasers,
 but
 with sincerity of heart,
 fearing the Lord.

3.23 **Whatever you do,**
48 from the heart
 be doing it,
 as to the Lord
 and
 not to men,
 because you know
 from the Lord
 that...you will receive the reward
 /-----|
 which is your inheritance.

49 **be subject to the Lord Christ;**
3.25 for
 the one doing wrong
50 **will be paid back**
 for what he has done wrong,
 and
51 **God is not partial.**

4.1 Masters,
52 **with justice**
 and
 equity treat your slaves,
 because you know
 that you also have a Master
 in Heaven.

Fundamentally the text divides into two sections as reflected in the direct address, ‘Slaves’ and ‘Masters.’ For some unknown strange reason the Dutch publisher Stephanus¹⁹ who set up the chapter and verse divisions of the New Testament in 1551 inserted a chapter break between these two basic but inner connected sections.²⁰ This work was done originally when he traveled from Paris to Marseille by horse back. Scholars have jokingly said over the years that, with such strange versifications of the text, his horse must have tripped when he inserted the break point. Clearly such illogical divisions do not reflect any level of divine inspiration.

The first pair of admonitions to slaves focus on submission to both their human (#48) and divine (#49)

¹⁹Robert I. Estienne went under the publishing name in Latin of Robertus Stephanus. For details, see “Robert I. Estienne,” Wikipedia online.

²⁰“The first person to divide New Testament chapters into verses was Italian Dominican biblical scholar Santi Pagnini (1470–1541), but his system was never widely adopted.³ Robert Estienne created an alternate numbering in his 1551 edition of the Greek New Testament.⁴ The first English New Testament to use the verse divisions was a 1557 translation by William Whittingham (c. 1524–1579). The first Bible in English to use both chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible published shortly afterwards in 1560. These verse divisions soon gained acceptance as a standard way to notate verses, and have since been used in nearly all English Bibles.” [“Chapters and verses of the Bible,” *Wikipedia* online]

masters. Two matching reasons (#s 50-51) are given for the admonitions. Everything connected to the slave's obligation to his human master is religiously oriented. One's faith commitment is the motivation to serve the master in a way that is pleasing to God.

The admonition to the masters stresses just and fair treatment of their slaves (# 52). At a participle clause level, the reason for this is the realization that even though being a human master they have God as their Master who will hold them accountable for their actions toward their slaves.



ROMAN SLAVES TEND THE HAIR OF THEIR MISTRESS

Exegesis of the Text:

The exegesis of the text will be based on the two natural divisions of 3:22-25 and 4:1 addressing first the slaves and then the masters.

Slaves' obligations, vv. 22-25:

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.

22 οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε κατὰ πάντα τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις, μὴ ἐν ὄφθαλμοδουλίαις, ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀπλότητι καρδίας, φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον. 23 ὃ ἔὰν ποιήτε, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, 24 εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας· τῷ κυρίᾳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε· 25 ὃ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὁ ἡδίκησεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολημψία.

Comparison to parallel texts. First, one needs to place the parallel texts elsewhere in the New Testament on the table for comparison. Such will sharpen the distinctives of the Colossian text.

The Eph. 6:5-8 parallel is the most important text for comparison:

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; 6 not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, 8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

5 Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ, 6 μὴ κατ’ ὄφθαλμοδουλίαν ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι ἀλλ’ ὡς δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ ποιοῦντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐκ ψυχῆς 7 μετ’ εύνοίας δουλεύοντες, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, 8 εἰδότες ὅτι ἔκαστος, ὃ ἂν ποιήσῃ ἀγαθόν, τοῦτο κομίσεται παρὰ κυρίου, εἴτε δοῦλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος.

The core admonition (v. 5a) is identical to the beginning admonition in Colossians 3:22: οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε... τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις. The expansion elements, -- beginning “*with...*” -- in vv. 5b-6 stress a similar theme as found in Col. 3:22b.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.

The wording is different but the essential points are the same. Ephesians is broader and more inclusive, as one might expect with the letter functioning as a cover letter for Colossians and Philemon.

First Timothy 6:1-2 stands in close connection also:

1 Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. 2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.

6.1 Ὅσοι εἰσὶν ὑπὸ ζυγὸν δοῦλοι, τοὺς ιδίους δεσπότας πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους ἡγείσθωσαν, ἵνα μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία βλασφημήσηται. 2 οἱ δὲ πιστοὺς ἔχοντες δεσπότας μὴ καταφρονείτωσαν, ὅτι ἀδελφοί εἰσιν· ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον δουλευέτωσαν, ὅτι πιστοί εἰσιν καὶ ἀγαπητοὶ οἱ τῆς εὐεργεσίας ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι.

The differences from Col. 3:22-25 here are more noticeable than with Eph. 6:5-8. The core admonition, τοὺς ιδίους δεσπότας πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους ἡγείσθωσαν, calls upon slaves to adopt an attitude of respect toward their masters, who are labeled τοὺς ιδίους δεσπότας rather than τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις as in Colossians

and Ephesians. No significant difference between these two terms is present. In 1 Timothy the goal is a good Christian witness by the slave for the gospel. The second admonition addresses slaves with Christian owners and calls upon them to not try to take advantage of the Christian faith of their master. Instead, the Christian slave should work harder for his Christian master since they share a common faith in Christ. The fundamentally negative attitude toward slavery is signaled by the phrase “*the yoke of slavery*” (ύπτο ζυγὸν δοῦλοι).

First Peter 2:18-25 is another important related text:

18 Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. 19 For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20 If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 22 “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” 23 When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

18 Οἱ οἰκέται ὑποτασσόμενοι ἐν παντὶ φόβῳ τοῖς δεσπόταις, οὐ μόνον τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς καὶ ἐπιεικέσιν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς σκολιοῖς. 19 τοῦτο γάρ χάρις εἰ διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ ὑποφέρει τις λύπας πάσχων ἀδίκως· 20 ποτὸν γάρ κλέος εἰ ἀμαρτάνοντες καὶ κολαφιζόμενοι ὑπομενεῖτε; ἀλλ' εἰ ἀγαθοποιοῦντες καὶ πάσχοντες ὑπομενεῖτε, τοῦτο χάρις παρὰ θεῷ. 21 εἰς τοῦτο γάρ ἐκλήθητε, ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ὑμῖν ὑπολιμπάνων ὑπογραμμὸν ἵνα ἐπακολουθήσητε τοῖς ἔχνεσιν αὐτοῦ· 22 ὃς ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ· 23 ὃς λοιδορούμενος οὐκ ἀντελοιδόρει, πάσχων οὐκ ἡπείλει, παρεδίσου δὲ τῷ κρίνοντι δικαιώς· 24 ὃς τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον, ἵνα ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ἀπογενόμενοι τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ζήσωμεν· οὐ τῷ μώλωπι ιάθητε. 25 ἡτε γάρ ως πρόβατα πλανώμενοι, ἀλλὰ ἐπεστράφητε νῦν ἐπὶ τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν.

Again the language is somewhat different, even at the core admonition in v. 18a: Οἱ οἰκέται ὑποτασσόμενοι ἐν παντὶ φόβῳ τοῖς δεσπόταις. Slaves are called *Oi oiketai* rather than *Oi douloi* as in the previous passages. The major difference is that Peter seems to be addressing just household slaves rather than the broader designation in the other texts. Masters are called *tois despotaies*, rather than *tois katà sarka kuriois* as in Ephesians and Colossians. But Peter’s terms essentially match those of Paul in First Timothy: *τοὺς ἴδιους δεσπότας*. No real difference is present between these two terms *δεσπόταις* and *κυρίοις*. Peter’s emphasis is upon Christian slaves showing proper respect for their master regardless of the way he treats them. The key motivation is Christ and His saving work in the life of the slave. Peter also sees Christ’s non-retaliation posture as the example to be followed by the slave in the midst of unjust treatment (cf. v. 21).

Core admonition. In Col. 3:22, the slave is to obey his human master:

ὑπακούετε...τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις. The admonition is virtually identical to that given to children in 3:20: ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα. Both slaves and children were expected to do what the father/master told them to do.²¹ The present tense imperative mood of the verb command ὑπακούετε



²¹ **ὑπακούω** impf. ὑπῆκουν; fut. ὑπακούσομαι; 1 aor. ὑπῆκουσα (s. ὑπακοή; Hom.+; ins, pap, LXX; TestSol 6:4 P; TestJob 4:8; Test12Patr; EpArist 44; Philo; Joseph., Ath. 15, 2) ‘listen to’.

1. **to follow instructions, obey, follow, be subject** to w. gen. of pers. (Hdt. 3, 101 al.; so predom. in pap and LXX; TestGad 8:3) B 9:1 (Ps 17:45 v.l.; the text has μοι). W. dat. of pers. (Thuc., Aristoph. et al.; Philo, Mos. 1, 156; Jos., Ant. 13, 275; TestJud 1:4; 18:6 θεῷ; Ath. 15:2 αὐτῷ [God]; Iren. 3, 21, 2 [Harv. II 113, 2]; in pap and LXX the dat. is less freq. than the gen. B-D-F §173, 3; 187, 6; s. Rob. 507; 634); **parents Eph 6:1; Col 3:20; masters Eph 6:5; Col 3:22;** cp. **Ro 6:16; husband** (cp. Philemon Com. 132 K. ἀγαθῆς γυναικός ἐστιν μὴ κρείτον’ εἶναι τάνδρος, ἀλλ’ ὑπῆκον; Jos., C. Ap. 2, 201) **1 Pt 3:6;** the ἐπίσκοπος IEph 20:2; cp. IMg 3:2 v.l. Funk (Sb 7835, 10 [I.B.C.] in the charter of the cult-brotherhood of Zeus Hypsistos: ὑπακούεν πάντας τοῦ ἰγούμενου); Christ Hb 5:9 (cp. Ael. Aristid. 50, 86 K.=26 p. 527 D.: τῷ θεῷ; EKamlah, Die Form der katalogischen Paränese im NT, ’64 [moral exhortation]). The pers. is supplied fr. the context (cp. PTebt 24, 26; TestJob 4:8; EpArist 44; 2 Ch 24:19 v.l.) **Phil 2:12;** 1 Cl 7:6;



stresses an ongoing continuous responsibility, not an occasional one. One should note the way in which Paul refers to the human masters of the slaves, τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις, underscores that this situation of slave/owner belongs to this world and is not a part of the higher order of the slave's commitment to God.

Expansion elements. The range of responsibilities is defined by κατὰ πάντα, *in everything*. The point here is to stress that compliance should not be spotty or fragmented. Rather, it should be inclusive and consistent. Paul begins by elaborating the quality of the service rendered by the slave in v. 22b. Then he brings in the spiritual commitment of the Christian slave as a key motivating factor in providing the high quality service to the master (vv. 22c-25).

The attitude of joyfulness and enthusiasm in obeying is stressed: μὴ ἐν ὄφθαλμοδουλίαις²² ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀπλότητι καρδίας. The negative aspect is defined first as doing service only when the owner's 'eyes' on watching him. The plural form ὄφθαλμοδουλίαις stresses not just an attitude but concrete expressions of such an attitude.²³ Second, his service is also not to be just to please his owner. To serve merely as a ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι reflects insincerity at a high level. Finally the fear of God is a motivating factor: φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον. Just as with children, and especially as with the wife (v. 18), the limits are within the framework of the slaves' Christian faith: φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον.

In Col. 3:23-24, the slave is to approach his service as actually serving God: ὃ ἔὰν ποιῆτε, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἔργαζεσθε, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις. The enthusiasm factor arises out of seeing the deeper service being to God and not just to a human master. The motivation for service then originates ἐκ ψυχῆς, from the core being of the individual. And it covers ὃ ἔὰν ποιῆτε, whatever work the slave does. The long view is the reward from God at the end of the journey: εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας. In this world the slave may be considered only as a piece of property, but he knows that in Christ he will one day inherit a home in Heaven with the God of this universe as His child. Thus he serves

57:4 (Pr 1:24). ὑπακούσωμεν τῷ ὄνόματι αὐτοῦ 1 Cl 58:1 marks the transition to the next usage (w. things).—‘*To be in compliance*’ (Aesop, Fab. 179 H.), w. dat. of the thing to which one is obedient or which one embraces in full surrender (cp. Athen. 6, 247d ὑπ. δείπνῳ=accept the invitation Theoph. Ant. 2, 25 [p. 162, 4] τῇ πατρικῇ ἐντολῇ) ὑπακούειν τῇ πίστει **Ac 6:7**; τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ **Ro 10:16**; **2 Th 1:8**; τῷ λόγῳ ἡμῶν **2 Th 3:14**; τῇ βουλήσει αὐτοῦ (=τοῦ θεοῦ) 1 Cl 9:1; 42:4 (Lat. tr.); τοῖς προστάγμασιν 2 Cl 19:3 (Aeschines 1, 49 and SIG 785, 18 τ. νόμοις; Demosth. 18, 204; Jos., Ant. 3, 207 τ. λεγομένοις; 5, 198); ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ (=τοῦ θυντοῦ σώματος ὑμῶν) **Ro 6:12**. ὑπηκούσατε εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδαχῆς vs. **17** (παραδίδωμι 1b, end).—MWolter, Ethos u. Identität in Paulinischen Gemeinden: NTS 43, ’97, 439 n. 32 (lit. and pseudopigr. reff.).—Foll. by the inf. which shows what the obedience results in (Gen 39:10) Αἴρατὸν ὑπῆκουσεν ἐξελθεῖν Abr. went out obediently **Hb 11:8**.—Also of the enforced obedience of hostile spirits or powers ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ they are forced to obey him **Mk 1:27**; of the elements **Mt 8:27** (OBetz, ZNW 48, ’57, 49–77, esp. 70–72); **Mk 4:41**; **Lk 8:25**; of a tree that must yield to a higher power **17:6** (cp. Hippocr., Epid. 3, 8; Galen VI 354 K., who speak of diseases that ὑπ.=‘must yield’ to a remedy [dative]).

2. to grant one's request, hear (of God Diod S 4, 34, 5 τοὺς ἀθανάτους ὑπακούσαντας; Vi. Aesopi I G 5 P. of Isis; Is 65:24; Jos., Ant. 14, 24.—X., Cyr. 8, 1, 18 of a judge who hears a plaintiff) 1 Cl 39:7 (Job 5:1).

3. to answer a knock at the door, technically of the door-keeper, whose duty it is to listen for the signals of those who wish to enter, and to admit them if they are entitled to do so: **open** or **answer** (the door) (Pla., Phd. 59e ὁ θυρωρός, ὅσπερ ειώθει ὑπακούειν, Crito 43a; X., Symp. 1, 11; Theophr., Char. 4, 9; 28, 3; Lucian, Icar. 22 et al.) προσῆλθεν παιδίσκη ὑπακούσαι **Ac 12:13**.—M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1028-29.]

²²“**ophthalmodoulia**. Not found outside the NT, this term refers in Eph. 6:6 to a douleia of slaves which is outwardly satisfactory but does not express an inner obligation for the sake of God and Christ, so that the eyes of the master are deceived. It also occurs in the plural in Col. 3:22 for the actions that make up this deceitful service.” [Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 182-86. S.V., “doulos, syndoulos, doule, douleuo, douleia,” by Karl H. Rengstorff.]

²³“A word not found before the Pauline writings (here and Eph 6:6), [it] may have been coined by the apostle; it signified that service performed only to attract attention—and therefore superficial—not for its own sake nor to please God or one's own conscience (Moule, 130; note Theodoret's comment on Eph 6:6, 7, cited by Lohse, 160: “He calls eye service that type of service which does not issue from a sincere heart, but is content in mere external appearance”).

[Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 227.]



SALE OF SLAVES IN A ROMAN CAMP

After the painting by R. Coque

the Lord Christ, as he serves his human master: τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε.

In Col. 3:25, the twofold reasons for such service are given. First, he knows that the God of justice will inflict punishment upon those treating people unjustly: ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὁ ἡδίκησεν. This applies both to the slave and to his master. Judgment Day will mean the righting of all wrongs by God Himself.²⁴ Second, the slave realizes that God has no favorites whom He excuses from just treatment of others: καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολημψία. In this world powerful masters may claim exemption from just and fair treatment of their slaves, but on Judgment Day such will not be the case. Both slave and master will be treated the same way by God. There is absolutely no partiality in the way God will treat both slave and master.



What the apostle Paul calls for here is a radically different Christian approach that is based upon one's faith relationship with Almighty God through Christ. The Christian slave is to always see a deeper dynamic present in his service to his human master. Both accountability by God and the justice of a holy God are a part of the motivation for his work.

In seeking to apply this text to the modern work place, the same basic values and principles would apply to the Christian worker. The believing employee needs to see the workplace as a ministry to God in the sense of rendering faithful service to his employer as a positive Christian witness to his boss. He should never try to take advantage of a Christian boss by asking for special favors and exemptions just because he and his boss share a common Christian faith. Resisting the temptation of retaliation at unjust treatment is the model set by Christ, in 1 Peter.

The temptation to serve one's master improperly during Paul's time was considerable. The slave was considered a piece of property owned by the master which opened the door to a host of potential abuses.²⁵

²⁴Some may be inclined to criticize Paul for not calling on the Christian slave to rebel at mistreatment. But clearly the stance of the New Testament consistently is that believers are not to inflict vengeance on those who mistreat them. Rather they are to trust in the justice and righteousness of a holy God who is 'set the record straight' if not in this life, certainly at the day of final judgment. Paul's admonition here is very consistent with the general teaching of the New Testament. First Peter 2:19-25 urges slaves when wrongly abused to follow the example of Christ in His trial and execution of not retaliating against those who abused Him.

Additionally, sociological dynamics were present in the ancient world that would not be true in modern times, as Scott Bartchy notes:

It must also be stressed that, despite the neat legal separation between owners and slaves, in none of the relevant cultures did persons in slavery constitute a social or economic class (see Garnsey and Saller 1987:109–25 for an analysis of class and status). Slaves' individual honor, social status, and economic opportunities were entirely dependent on the status of their respective owners, and they developed no recognizable consciousness of being a group or of suffering a common plight (Bradley 1987:15). For this reason, any such call as "slaves of the world, unite!" would have fallen on completely deaf ears.

Furthermore, by no means were those in slavery regularly to be found at the bottom of the social-economic pyramid (MacMullen 1974:93–94). Rather, in that place were those free and impoverished persons who had to look for work each day without any certainty of finding it (day laborers), some of whom eventually sold themselves into slavery to gain some job security.

[S. Scott Bartchy, "Slavery: New Testament" In vol. 6, The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 66.]

²⁵"The quality of daily life of all those in slavery, but especially that of household slaves (and children), depended almost entirely upon the particular character and mood of the owner (or father; see Eph 6:4): Greco-Roman slave systems and legal frameworks gave slave owners much room to be cruel or compassionate.

"For example, even as adults those in slavery were subject to corporal punishment, private or public. Demosthenes had said (22.55) that the greatest difference between a slave and a free person is that the slave 'is answerable with his body for all offenses.' And the reputation of slaves for deception was met by Roman laws requiring that their testimony for law courts had to be verified under torture. Here it is noteworthy that by the 2d century C.E. Rome made corporal punishment and torture legal also for the humiliores, the lower classes among the free, citizen population.

"Further, the fact that the owner of slaves owned the bodies and not just the work of the persons in slavery meant that slaves were generally regarded as sexually available without restriction. With respect to sexual exploitation of slaves, Hillel is remembered to have said: 'Whoever multiplies female slaves multiplies promiscuity' (m. 'Abot 2.8). So it is striking that neither the sexual risks

With an abusive owner a slave would face huge challenges to giving sincere, enthusiastic service to him. But this is exactly the challenge that Paul laid down for Christian slaves.

In one possible application to our world, one needs to see the Christian worker in the work place. Down through the centuries when Christians have been real Christians in the work place, their witness for Christ has been strong. But when they fail to honor Christ by their labor in the work place Christianity has been given a ‘black eye.’ No where in these instructions of Paul is there room for a bully pulpit in the work place where Christian workers seek to push their religion on to others. The Christian witness of the worker is gained by the way he or she does their work while on the job.

Masters' obligations, v. 1:

1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

4.1 οἱ κύριοι, τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἴστοτητα τοῖς δούλοις παρέχεσθε, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ.

While several related texts addressing the slave are found, only Eph. 6:9 stands in parallel to Col. 4:1:

And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

9 Καὶ οἱ κύριοι, τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς, ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ὑμῶν ὁ κύριος ἔστιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ προσωπολημψία οὐκ ἔστιν παρ’ αὐτῷ.

In Ephesians, Paul admonishes the masters to treat their slaves the same way slaves are to treat their masters: τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς. A key part of this equal treatment is the demand to stop threatening their slaves: ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν. The motivation is the realization of their accountability to God who stands as their Master and judges impartially: εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ὑμῶν ὁ κύριος ἔστιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ προσωπολημψία οὐκ ἔστιν παρ’ αὐτῷ.

Also to be noted is that in the secular world of Paul somewhat similar admonitions to slave owners can be found, as Peter O'Brien notes:²⁶

This admonition finds parallels in both Hellenistic and Jewish ethics. On the Greek side these appear as early as Plato (*Leges* 6.776d–788a) and Aristotle (*Politica* 1260b.6), while during the Roman period Seneca was the most ardent advocate of the humane treatment of slaves (note especially his forty-seventh letter to Lucilius, cf. J. N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca* [NovTSup 4; Leiden: Brill, 1961] 185–92; Crouch, *Origin*, 117–19). He does not attack the institution of slavery as such but accepts it as part of the existing social order. He feels great pity for slaves, expresses keen censure of the way they are treated and condemns the misuse of slaves for all kinds of contemptible tasks even though he recognizes some slaves are anything but faultless (cf. Sevenster, *Paul*, 186). Seldom do the Stoic codes, however, refer to the relations of masters to slaves. Palestinian Judaism accepted the institution of slavery, and slaves were viewed as the property of their masters (Str-B 4, 717). Hellenistic Jewish circles knew and used current Hellenistic appeals to masters to treat their slaves properly (so Eccl 4:30, “Be not like a lion in your home, and tyrannous and terrible toward your slaves,” also 7:20, 21; 33:31; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2:66–68, 89–91; 3:137–43; *Ps Phocylides* 224; see Crouch, *Origin*, 118, 119, for further examples).

The motivations behind these admonitions are non-religious almost always. Economically it made sense to treat one's slave humanely. This would especially be true where only one or two slaves might be in the household. In Judaism a religious motive from the Torah might enter the picture but often the same motives as their non-Jewish neighbors promoted the admonitions.

Core admonition. In Col. 4:1, Paul insists upon just and fair treatment of slaves by Christian owners: τὸ

for slaves nor the related temptations for their owners are mentioned specifically in NT documents, unless Paul had owners of slaves in mind when urging Christians ‘that you abstain from immorality, that each of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor’ (1 Thess 4:3–4, RSV).²⁷

[S. Scott Bartchy, “Slavery: New Testament” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 68–69.]

²⁶Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 234.



δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἰσότητα τοῖς δούλοις παρέχεσθε. Note the comments of O'Brien:²⁷

The apostle does not command the masters to free their slaves, but he clearly “points to an amelioration of the slaves’ lot” (Martin, *NCB*,; 124): they are to treat them justly and fairly. “What is just or right” (*τὸ δίκαιον BAG*,; 196, comments: “The neuter denotes that which is obligatory in view of certain requirements of justice”; cf Schrenk, *TDNT* 2, 187, 188; Hinson, *RevExp* 70 [1973] 505, following Hugéde, 197, suggests that it might refer to salary; the idea of honest remuneration might be implied in the notion of “fairness” especially as *παρέχομαι* rendered “treat” means literally to “grant,” see *BAG*, 626) is paralleled by “what is fair” (*τὴν ἰσότητα, BAG*,; 381, Stählin, *TDNT* 3, 354, 355). The relationship between the two was frequently discussed in the moral teaching and instruction of popular philosophy (the two terms were often treated as synonyms; Philo gives a detailed exposition of “fairness,” *ἰσότης*, in Rerdisher 141–206, calling it the “mother of justice” [*μήτηρ δικαιοσύνης*], *Despecleg* 4, 231; cf Stählin, *TDNT* 3, 354, 355, Lohse, 162). Here the second term reinforces the first denoting “the spirit of equity as distinct from the letter of obligation” (Radford, 296, cited by Hinson, *RevExp* 70 [1973] 505; note Lightfoot, 228, who says, “the word naturally suggests an even-handed, impartial treatment,” and Abbott, 296, who describes it as “what cannot be brought under positive rules, but is in accordance with the judgment of a fair mind,” cf Stählin, *TDNT* 3, 355; against Meyer, 461, 462, and others who suppose the meaning to be that slaves are to be treated as equals — but this is an obscure way of expressing such a thought). So any harsh measures of repression or victimization of those in a helpless position (Martin, *NCB*, 124) are clearly ruled out (cf Eph 6:9).

The just and fair treatment demanded here grows out of the assurance Paul had given the abused slave in 3:25 about God’s actions in final judgment: ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὁ ἡδίκησεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολημψία. “**For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.**” This was assurance for the slave, but a warning to the slave owner. With a Christian master in view, this warning took on added importance.

The motivation for such humane treatment of slaves by Christian masters is clear: εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ. The masters must remember that they have God as their Master and He will hold them accountable for how they treat their slaves.²⁸ One should note the role of warning about the day of final judgment both in 4:1b and 3:24-25. In both references the principle of divine accountability is emphasized. Every person will be utterly accountable to God for how they treat others! This day of judgment for the Christian slave should be viewed positively for it will mean the receiving of an inheritance as a child of God: ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας. For the Christian master it means that he must give account of his actions toward his slaves to God who stands as his Master (οἱ κύριοι ==> κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ). The principle of accountability is the axiom stated in 3:25, ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὁ ἡδίκησεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολημψία, “**For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.**” God will particularly hold the Christian slave owner accountable for how he has treated his slaves! In Eph. 6:9, this reality focused on the call by Paul to Christian slave owners to stop threatening their slaves: ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν.²⁹ They could not motivate their slaves to serve properly through the use of heavy-handed threats of punishment. This was the approach of a non-Christian slave owner, not one who shared

²⁷Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 232.

²⁸Note O’Brien’s comments (WBC, 233):

“εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ. “Because you know that you also have a Master in heaven” (NIV). The motivation for this just and fair treatment is basically the same as the slave’s motive for obeying his master (v 24; note the repetition of εἰδότες, “knowing”). Masters also (καὶ ὑμεῖς, “you too”), like their slaves, are answerable to a greater Master in heaven (with the words κύρος ἐν οὐρανῷ, “a Master in heaven,” one is reminded of 3:1–4 — Christ is in heaven seated at the Father’s right hand in the place of honor). This one Lord and Judge will decide whether these earthly masters have done what is truly just and fair. His will is the assessment that really counts. The relationship between masters and slaves has undergone a basic change. Both owe obedience to the one Lord, and therefore both have the true standard for their conduct toward one another (cf Sevenster, *Paul*, 192; it is at this point of motivation that, for all their apparent similarities, Paul and Seneca part company).”

²⁹“Whereas Seneca (Ep. 47; see under Form/Structure/Setting for this quotation) had reminded masters that they were under the same power, Chance, and were therefore fellow slaves, this writer reminds Christian masters that they are under the same Lord, Christ, as their slaves, and are, therefore, his fellow slaves. If masters realize this, it will mean that, although they have power, they will not abuse it by heavy-handed threats of punishment, treating their slaves as property on whom they can arbitrarily work out their frustrations (Seneca’s comments on the importance of masters’ controlling their anger illustrate the vulnerability of slaves to their masters’ moods; cf. De Ira 3.24.2; 3.32.1, and Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery*, 179–80). Angry threatening would simply humiliate slaves and would at best produce ‘eye service.’ It would not encourage obedience from the heart or serving with enthusiasm.” [Andrew T. Lincoln, vol. 42, *Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 423.]

the same faith in Christ as did his slave!

2. What does the text mean to us today?³⁰

How do we apply this text in our world? Increasingly commentators have realized the difficulty present here because of the cultural gap between that day and ours. They experienced substantial slavery in their world, and we do not apart from isolated instances which are themselves forbidden by governmental laws. In the world until modern times, slavery could be found in most cultures where Christianity flourished, and thus the application was simpler to make.³¹ But where slavery no longer is legally present in a society, how does one apply these verses?

For the last century or more in North America and Europe, the dominant application of these verses has shifted to the work place and thus the discussion centers around employee / employer relationships.³² But one must raise serious questions about the assumptions being used here:

1. Can one arbitrarily shift a discussion unquestionably regarding ancient family relationships to the market place? And this is done only with the third set of discussions, and not with the first two sets. Hermeneutically, making such a drastic shift rather arbitrarily seems questionable. The only plausible basis for making this major shift from the home to the market place is the plea that slavery no longer exists in the modern world.

2. Even when this shift is made, serious objections can be raised as to its suitability. The modern work place does not make slaves out of the employees. Sometimes the plea is made to this effect, but the modern worker even in bad working conditions has freedoms and options available that the ancient slave would not have imagined. Clearly the modern worker is not legally a 'piece of property' even though he or she may at times feel like it.

3. These questions arise because one of the foundational principles of historical interpretation of scripture asserts that the closer the modern world is to the ancient world on a principle or theme, the more direct the application of an ancient scripture text to the modern world becomes. And the converse is true also. The greater the cultural distance between the 'then' and 'now' meanings of the text the less direct and clear the modern application becomes.

And in this discussion of ancient slaves and their masters, even though both are assumed to be Christian in Colossians and Ephesians, there is no legitimate modern counterpart to that ancient cultural situation. Thus the cultural distance between the 'then' and 'now' meanings is substantial, if even existing at all.

How then can we build an interpretive bridge over time from the 'then' to the 'now' meaning of the text?

1. The first step is to seek to find modern situations that are as close to the ancient situation as is legitimately possible. Although clearly not an exact parallel, one of the closest connections of this ancient household setting with slaves to our day is where there is domestic help employed to assist in running a household. In such modern settings, how the head of the house treats those who prepare the food, clean

³⁰One of my ongoing concerns in developing these background studies is to provide both instruction and an example on how to do solid biblical interpretation of scripture. Often making a modern application of an ancient scripture text is fairly simple. But in instances such as this passage, legitimate application becomes much more challenging. And these applications must be set forth as possible rather than as certain.

³¹"THE WITNESS OF OBEDIENCE TO GRACE. AMBROSIASTER: Christianity promises the kingdom of heaven only to those who believe, in order that they will not feel human pride on meriting this. Our faith is by grace, which is exalted to a higher plane than works. Only faith avails. On this gracious premise we are ordered to discharge all that is due to earthly masters. This will have the effect of inciting all the more the minds of unbelievers toward the worship of God. They will see by our behavior that our religion is both righteous and humble. Then, as masters see their slaves become more educated and more faithful in rendering service, they will see with what light reins true religion exercises governance in human affairs. So, when servants for their part notice the increased kindness of their masters, they will be similarly moved to more avid faith. EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS 6.5.12

"WHY PAUL DID NOT OMIT THIS INJUNCTION. THEODORET: It was necessary for Paul to offer instructions for slaves. They were present everywhere in the church, which contains all classes and strata of human society, both men and women, parents and children, slaves and masters, rich and poor, governors and the governed. EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS 6.5.13"

[M. J. Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 8.* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 203-04.]

³²"Slaves had no options in relationships with their masters. The same general principles apply in a worker's relationship with his boss. However, as with wives and children, the employee would not be obligated to do anything unethical, illegal, immoral, or to endanger himself or others. He would be free to find other employment within the will of God." [Max Anders, vol. 8, *Galatians-Colossians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 189.]

the house, take care of the children etc. becomes critically important. And especially is this true when both parties are believers in Christ.

2. A step back with some greater distance between the ‘then’ and ‘now’ aspects of the text is to discern timeless principles of relationships between individuals in situations where one person possesses some kind of delegated authority over the other.³³ If the situation involves Christians, then the distance is somewhat less and the application is made easier.

Clearly what Paul teaches here is that the person under authority must do his or her work with genuineness and by avoiding superficial phoney appearances. The motivations for doing ‘a good job’ for the believer lie deeper than seeking promotions or raises in salary. The worker is serving Christ by doing quality work for another. Additionally the person in authority over others must recognize his or her ultimate accountability to God for how they supervise those working under their authority. This implies using relationship principles and strategies to encourage the worker to do their work genuinely and properly. It eliminates the use of abusive practices toward those working under their supervision.

What Paul envisions for the ancient family here with slaves has relevance to a variety of modern settings. It can have some application to the modern work place, but clearly should not be limited to just this. The sports field, the school class room, serving in social clubs, relating to clerks etc. in the stores and many more settings have relevancy to Paul’s words. As Christians our commitment should be to treat others with respect and humility in ways that encourage the best from them, not only in what they do for us but in how they live generally.

- 1) What is your attitude toward your supervisor at work?

- 2) How do you approach doing your work on the job, at school, in your social organizations?

- 3) What is your attitude toward those you supervise at work or in other settings?

- 4) How do you treat others who are doing things for you?

³³One interesting direction in application is found in *The Preacher’s Commentary* by Maxie Dunnam and Lloyd Ogilvie:

While Paul may have been cited as a champion of the status quo and in support of oppressive systems, this is a misuse of his message. Because he expected Christ to return soon, he expected the institution of slavery to be abolished without human effort. Even so, he called for a transformation of attitude and thus of relationship within external strictures of slavery. The obedience of a slave to a master was to become a heart response “as to Christ,” not a response in cowering, manipulative “eye service, as men-pleasers.” Masters were to relate to their servants in the same way, as to Christ—how radical!—“giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him” (v. 9).

The lessons are clear and relate to all. (1) The slave who becomes a Christian is the Lord’s freedman though he may still belong to an earthly master; likewise the free person who becomes a Christian is Christ’s slave. (2) Inner freedom is not tied to external status. In Paul’s thinking, with the expectation of the parousia, to attempt to change one’s status would have been a tacit denial of the fact that one’s relation to God is a matter of trust/faith; Paul’s conviction that inner freedom is what matters caused him to see that attempts to change one’s situation makes the externals more important than they really are.

[Maxie D. Dunnam and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 31, *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 31 : Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians / Philemon, The Preacher’s Commentary series* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), 234.]