

Work Relationships: Serving Jesus in the Marketplace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 September 2026

Preacher: John Hopkins

[0:00] Open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3. That's where we're going to, of course, be spending some time again this morning. If I haven't met you, my name is John Hopkins.

I'm one of the pastors here at Tri-State Community Church, and I get the privilege of bringing God's Word to you today. So we're actually almost three-quarters of the way through this series on Colossians.

Next week, John Wansnider will be preaching, and then I'll pick up Colossians again on the 20th. But we're getting to the closing stage of this book. And I just want to remind you or catch you up to speed if this is your first time here.

Colossians was written to address a heresy that was rising up in the city of Colossae in Asia. And it was a belief system that is actually very common today, that idea of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism teaches that God is distant, that He doesn't really like us. That He is completely other in the spiritual realm, and that the physical, the material is all bad, and God wants to distance Himself.

[1:08] And that the only way that we can get to God is to jump through all these hoops, to control our behavior, to engage with angels, to get us help to get up there.

And even then, we're probably not going to be good enough, and we need to find some expert, some spiritual elite, who can take us the rest of the way into the presence of this God who really doesn't like us or want anything to do with us.

But we've got to get there if we're going to understand life. And what Paul is addressing in Colossians is that's all wrong. From the understanding of God's relationship to us, to how we get access to God, and what that looks like in our lives, Paul is saying, no, this is all different.

The heretics have it all wrong. And what it's centered around is mystery. As we face our lives, there are things, tragedies that we face, hardship that blindsides us, or just the grind, the daily grind of the sameness, of trying to pay bills and care for our families, and those types of things.

Why do we go through this stuff? It's a mystery. And we're trying to figure out why that is. Or sometimes, it's great things. And we discover, why are we experiencing this goodness or this grace of God?

[2:31] I think I mentioned a few weeks ago that part of what led C.S. Lewis to Christ was that he was surprised by joy. Why am I happy? It was a surprise.

And that made him start thinking about, there must be something more. But life, fundamentally, is a mystery. It can be very confusing to us. And so the Gnostics were trying to explain how to unveil that mystery, how to explain it, so we could understand all the confusing things about life.

And they got it entirely wrong. What Paul is saying is, I'm showing you the mystery revealed, the answer to all the questions, which raises more questions, which we've been unpacking.

But he said, the mystery revealed is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He says that in chapter 1. Christ resides in us.

When we put our trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, there is an exchange that goes on on several levels. The main thing is that our sin is placed on Jesus, and his righteousness is placed on us.

[3:40] Not only are we declared righteous by God the judge in a legal sense, but we are actually made righteous. We receive the goodness of God.

And Jesus takes our sin. That's our hope. That's part of the mystery revealed. And then we get a new identity. And within the context of that new identity, we have a new way of living.

And that living, as we live out our identity in Christ, as we walk with him, the mysteries that we face, a couple things happen. One, we see the answer.

Or we realize, you know what, that question is really not that important. Because I'm walking with somebody that I can trust who does know the way. And woven through all of it, in this revealed mystery, is not a God who is distant, who doesn't like us, who we have to trick and convince to accept us in our presence.

Oh no, that's not the God of the New Testament. The God of the New Testament loves you. He sees you. He wants to draw you into relationship with him. We're not pursuing him.

[4:48] He's pursuing us. And inviting us into something more. That's the message of Colossians. That's the point that we're trying to convey.

So a few core ideas that we need to keep in mind. One that was central in chapter 2 was Colossians 2.23. I think I've got a slide for that.

Paul is talking about, at the end of chapter 2, all these rules that the Gnostics are trying to oppose upon us, they don't make any difference. And this is what Paul said.

These are matters which have to be sure the appearance of wisdom, excuse me, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body. So it feels right. We think, you know what? If God's reluctant to have anything to do with us, and he's righteous and holy and we're not, we must have to just force ourselves into the right type of person to make ourselves acceptable to God.

[5:50] And that makes sense to us. We think, well, that must be how it is. So it appears to be wise.

But Paul says, but these things are of no value against fleshly indulgence. Zero. Rules can't change your behavior.

You can't say to yourself, I'm going to do this positive thing. Because you just, you can't sustain it. Or I'm not going to do this negative thing. You can't sustain it.

You just can't. You just can't. Rules don't make a difference in our lives. And we have to come to grips with that fact. Now, the Bible does teach that we need to be disciplined.

But that's an entirely different thing. That's living out our identity. Having a set of rules just doesn't touch us. I saw a meme on Facebook this week that really got under my skin.

[6:54] And it was appropriate. But many of you, not all of you, saw the movie Nacho Libre, which is about a young man who wants to be a professional wrestler, championship wrestler. Even if you haven't seen Nacho Libre, I'm sure at some point in your life, you saw the old school professional wrestling.

You know, Hulk Hogan and Dwayne The Rock Johnson. You know, it's all stage. It's all, some of you may not believe this, but it's all fake. If you don't, I don't want to hear about it later.

We can agree to disagree. But the scene in this meme is Nacho Libre. The hero is laying on the mat. And that's us in this metaphor.

And the bad guy is standing on top of Nacho Libre. His foot is on Nacho Libre's neck. And the bad guy is labeled as the flesh and sin. And so Nacho Libre is laying on the ground and he's thinking about why he found himself in this position.

And what, who am I? Am I just a guy who's going to be defeated or can I rise up? And the person who's using that scene from the movie shows his thought process.

[8:05] He's looking at all these great books. All these books of theology and teaching. And as he reminds himself, now this part's good, as he reminds himself of these biblical truths, he leaps to his feet and knocks the bad guy down.

And with every blow, there's a subtitle. Of how he's defeating flesh and sin. Read the Bible and pray and go to church.

I'm going to tell you something really controversial. The person who put together that meme was wrong. He was wrong. Those are just more rules.

We make the mistake as good Christians of just adding more rules. Oh, you've got a sin problem? You need to read the Bible. Okay. I think if we're honest with ourselves, that really doesn't help.

We go back to the same thing. As a dog returns to his vomit, the proverb says. We just keep doing it. Paul, the apostle Paul, said, I do what I don't want to do and I don't do what I do want to do.

[9:16] So what are the place of these things? We'll come back to that. But rules are of no value to change our behavior. That's the heart of the heresy. Is that we can somehow do what needs to be done to earn access to God.

It's not true. We can't. I'm not going to leave you there. So in Colossians chapter 3, if you've got your Bibles, you can look at it or I'm going to have it up on the screen. This is where chapter 3 begins.

So Paul ends chapter 2. Rules don't help. And he immediately gives us the answer. So what does help bring about change in us?

Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, in other words, if you have put your trust in Christ, you've received new life with him. One of the things that Paul does repeatedly in his epistles is he talks in the past tense.

In Ephesians, he talks about the fact that we are in the heavenly places in Christ. It's already happened. He talks about the things that we have in Christ in the past tense. We already have them. So if you have been raised up with Christ, if you have received him, in a very real sense, you're already in heaven.

[10:26] You already have access. We're already there in the presence of God. It's an already but not yet idea. So therefore, if you've been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, seek first the kingdom of God and all his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

We're looking to Jesus. We're following him. We're patterning our lives after him because that's our new identity.

Keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above. Not in the things that are on earth. For you have died.

And your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

[11:28] I want to focus on that phrase, revealed with him in glory, just briefly. I mean, my devotions, several days I've been reading through John's letters to the churches. In the book of Revelation.

And I read, you know, one chapter after another. And sometimes the problem with that is you remember what you read, but then the new chapter comes, the new chapter comes, and what was behind we forget.

And so this morning as I read through the end of chapter 3 of Revelation, I thought every one of those seven letters that were given to the churches, where Jesus is speaking to the churches, ends with, and to the overcomers, and to the overcomers, I will give some blessing.

He repeatedly talks about these blessings that we have for the overcomers. And one of them that really stood out to me was that, I can't remember which church, it doesn't matter, because this is true of us if we were walking with Christ.

That Jesus is going to glorify us. Jesus is going to say, look at my son.

[12:36] Look at my daughter. I am so proud of this person. Put your name in that blank. That's going to happen.

We are going to be revealed with Christ in glory as his fellow heirs, as children of God. That's our identity. That's who we are. And so we need to set our minds on what is our identity.

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? And how do we live that out? How does a follower of Jesus behave? We've got to think about that and behave accordingly.

Finally, Colossians 3, 1-17 really unpacks that in greater detail. I love verse 12.

This is the next slide. So as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, that is you. That is you.

[13:38] I've said it every week. You've got to get in your head. You are chosen of God. It wasn't a, oh, fine, I'll take that guy. You're not the last kid. You remember on the playground and you're picking teams?

I can still remember coming home and telling my mom I was picked first. Happened once. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? And everybody's afraid of being picked last.

You're not the last person picked. You're not. God delights to pick you. He loves you. You are chosen.

That is significant. You're chosen. You are holy. That means you have the righteousness of God. He is thrilled. And you're beloved.

You are loved. Well, you don't know me. I'm not talking about me. I'm talking about God who knows you better than I do.

[14:43] And he loves you. That's your identity. And so Paul goes on to talk about what do people of whom that is true, how do we live? We put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

So that's the life. And then, this is where we were last week in verses 18 through the end of the chapter, actually the first chapter, first verse of chapter 4, Paul takes very, what's the word I'm looking for, very real, very tangible examples that we're all familiar with to show your identity in Christ is lived out in life.

It's in marriage. It's in family. Today, we're going to look at how our faith is lived out in the marketplace. Our faith, our identity in Christ is very practical.

It should be expressed everywhere we go. And we're going to talk about how that works. So let's pray together, and then we're going to read part of Colossians chapter 3 and get started in the message today.

Father, thank you for this new identity. Thank you that everything that we're doing in our lives is in partnership with you. That we don't have to drum up the wisdom.

[16:04] We don't have to drum up the strength. We don't have to figure out how to be good enough to be accepted by you. But instead, we are accepted.

We are beloved. We are chosen. And now you are working in us to see that become reality in our lives.

And that's the best possible thing we could ever experience. Help us to see that. Help us to own our identity and to answer the question, how does somebody who is chosen and holy and beloved behave?

And live out that life knowing that that's you who are at work in us, both to will and to work according to your good pleasure. God, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So Colossians chapter 3, we're going to start in verse 22.

Slaves in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

[17:07] 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.

For he who does wrong or is he the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Masters, grant your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a master in heaven.

So we're going to look at the marketplace. I want to back up a little bit and talk a little bit about our conversation last week to set the stage. So I got a lot of really positive comments about people getting a broader understanding of the relationships within marriage.

Comments I heard were things like, I'd never thought of my marriage as a dance. I had been taught that the husband was the ruler of the house, like a king, and the wife's role was just to follow along submissively and just do what she's told.

In a sense, abdicating any responsibility to her husband. And the idea of a dance was a new concept for some of you, and I'm glad. I hope you'll learn to live that out and to experience that.

[18:20] But don't, and follow along that line. We want to see marriages that are lived out in the way Christ intended. But don't lose sight of the fact that in this passage, Paul was addressing the marriage relationship, but he was also using it as an illustration that applies to all of us universally.

Married or unmarried, doesn't matter. Kids, no kids, doesn't matter. He was using it as an illustration. The most intimate human relationship is between a husband and wife, and then right after that is between parents and children.

And what he was saying to us is your life in Christ, your identity, that's where it should appear. It's not something separate.

Who you are in Christ should be expressed to your spouse, to your friends, to the people you cross paths with. How do you love well?

How do you submit to one another here or even out there? There's times we have to submit.

There's authority in our lives. We all have authority we have to submit to. How do you submit?

[19:32] Paul was using marriage as an example to help you think through what does the life in Christ look like in the real world?

The world that we touch and taste and smell every day and wrestle with. Same thing with the relationship between fathers and sons. We all have places where we're in authority. How do we exercise that authority?

Do we exasperate the people who are underneath us? Well, what are we doing? And like children, are we obeying? The Christian life, your life in Christ, has bearing on every second of your life. It informs it. It empowers it. It shows you how to live. And you are doing it in concert, in step with Jesus himself. What we talked about last week was obviously about marriage, but it was also an illustration.

Hold that in your mind. If you're not married, you don't get a free pass. It applies to everyone. And we want to see our life lived out that way. The same is true this week as we talk about the marketplace.

[20 : 45] Now, of course, you just heard me talk about slaves and masters. We don't have that in our world anymore. So it's not a perfect analogy. In the first century, slavery was common.

If you were a moderately well-off person, what we call upper middle class, you would probably not have hired help. Oftentimes, you'd have a slave that you owned.

And that person was treated as property. And even at that extreme, Paul's addressing, there's a way to bring your faith in Christ into those relationships, both as a slave and as the master.

Now, the principles that we're going to see this morning also apply to us as employers and employees. There's enough common ground there that you're going to see, just like with marriage, Paul is telling us, how do we behave as employees?

What does that look like? How do we behave as employers? What does somebody whose identity is having Christ in him or her, how does that live out in the marketplace?

[21 : 52] But again, it's also an illustration of a very common relationship or web of relationships that we're part of that we need to think about and say, okay, if that's true there where I work, how is it true everywhere else I go?

How is that true in my neighborhood? How is that true in my family? How does my life in Christ, in Christ's life in me, find expression? So I'm going to start out with negatives.

I have worked over the course of my life, those of you who are part of the hiring process saw my resume, which is absurdly long, because I've worked a lot of different jobs over the course of my life.

And some of the times I've worked for Christians. I'm going to tell you about two of them, both of which are negative examples. And I want to start by telling you that the men that I worked for were men I knew very well, and they were very serious about their walk with God.

I've known them, even when I was employed by them, I'd already known them for decades. I observed them. The first example is a nationwide furniture chain I worked for.

[22 : 56] I'm not going to tell you the name. And it's based in Colorado. All of the executives went to our church. And Kara and I disciplined every single one of their children.

All of them. I knew their families intimately. A couple of those couples were people that we watched in their marriages and in their relationship with their kids and said, that's the type of marriage we want to have.

That's the type of parents we want to be. We followed their example. But then I went to work in one of their stores. And I'll tell you straight up, they were the worst jobs I've ever had.

I worked 70 to 80 hours a week. It was poorly planned. We had some practices that came from headquarters in Colorado that were frankly very unethical.

I can remember at one point we were supposed to push a warranty program for furniture where if you bought this warranty program, you would get your furniture was protected from breakage.

[24 : 07] And part of it was we were push, push, pushing this furniture polish that was an upcharge. It was such a bad product that we wouldn't use it on our displays in the stores because it would stain them.

I mean, we had a can of pledge that had the sleeve from our company's product. So we were undercover.

And keep in mind, this is a company run by Christian men, serious Christian men who knew their Bibles, who were role models in other parts of their lives.

And I would complain. I'll tell you I'm human. I was a much younger man. And one of the things I look back in my life as a failure is that I should have sat down with those men after I quit and told

them my experience as one of their employees, and I was afraid.

And I didn't. I think we have to have those conversations with each other. But that was a horrible experience. And I remember hearing those men say, well, that's just the nature of retail.

[25:16] That's just how it is. We can't change it. That's how it is. Really? I don't accept that. So that's one negative example.

A few years later, I went to work for a flooring store. The man who owned it was a deacon at our church. He was a deacon when I was 14 years old and came to Christ.

And as far as I know, he's still a deacon at that church. You would love this guy. He's one of the kindest, gentlest men you'd ever meet. But again, working for him was horrible.

He recycled his staff every two years like clockwork for 20 years. And I can remember him coming and saying, John, I just don't understand.

It's happening again. Everybody just quit. And again, I didn't have courage. What I shared is, you know, there's one thing that's a common denominator between all these groups of staff, staff that keeps leaving.

[26:16] My brother, it's you. Look in the mirror. He was always frustrated that people didn't show him loyalty.

But he had no concept of showing loyalty to other people. His last story of denigrating this guy, he and his best friend went back years. They were both deacons together.

And his friend, I'll give you his name because it's funny. He was Bob and he was a builder. So Bob the Builder, Bob would not buy flooring from our store because his best friend, godly man, insisted, well, if we're friends, you'll pay full retail.

Well, if you're a contractor, you know contractors get contracting prices. Contractor prices. And so Bob the Builder went to Home Depot. He went to Lowe's. And I can remember my boss saying, I am so angry with Bob.

He just bid this huge house and I didn't get to bid on it. Hey, knucklehead. There's a problem here. My point with this is, these men, don't miss this.

[27:25] These men who love Jesus, truly love Jesus. I have no doubt about that. But there was a disconnect in their minds where from Sunday, when they were leading in our church and developing people, developing me as a man of God, as a leader, as a husband, as a father, when the bell rang on Monday morning, it's like they got a brain transplant.

What Paul is saying here is, no, no, no. Your life in Christ is not in a silo. It's not nine to noon on a Sunday morning. It is all of your life.

And it's easy for us to laugh at these examples that I've given from my life. And you probably have similar examples. Instead of pointing the fingers at those people who have failed, we need to learn from them and look in the mirror.

Where do I do that? Where is my identity as a Christ follower not finding expression out in the world? That's Paul's point in this section of Colossians.

So let's talk about some stuff that he's addressing here. So he starts in verse 23. Slaves in all things, obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external services, those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

[28:46] Okay, we've already established we're not talking about slaves. We're not slaves. I've actually heard people say, usually they're the boss, well, I want my employees to just obey me.

Bummer. Not gonna happen. But we do have a responsibility to do our jobs well, to heed what they tell us, to do it the way that they tell us to do it.

To listen to what we're being told. And not just with Christian bosses, but bosses in general. And I think there's a place to say, why do we do it this way? Why are we engaging in this practice that isn't ethical?

I think that's part of how we're salt and light in the world. But as a Christ follower, we should be submitting to our bosses and doing things as they tell us and following our directions.

We want to be people who are obedient to what they're asking us to do and giving our best. He goes on, same verse there, not with external services, those who merely please men.

[29:59] Another spot on my storied resume, I worked at Amazon for a while. Amazon has cameras everywhere, except in the bathroom. There were guys who would go in, they would log in the computer, do some busy work for a little while, and then go camp out in the bathroom for their entire shift.

Now just as a side note, I don't understand that. Working hard makes a 10-hour shift feel like eight hours or six hours. Sitting in the bathroom? That feels like eternity. But I guess they had their phones, so they were shrinking their brains and occupying themselves.

But they were not working wholeheartedly. They had no concept of serving the Lord. The idea is that we want to be people who are looking, who are going above and beyond, who are figuring out ways to be more efficient, who are figuring out what can we do to make this better, to make the experience better for everybody I work with, to be all in.

That's how a Christ follower works, is wholeheartedly. And what's the qualifier here? First, not as those who merely please men.

Sometimes people say, you know, you don't have to do that much. I've had bosses say that. I don't need it that clean, or I don't need things done to that degree. Thank you, but, and sometimes you need to listen and go, okay, I'm wasting time making things perfect.

[31 : 28] But oftentimes, as believers, we bring in a higher standard that raises all the boats that are there with us. You've heard that, a rising tide lifts all boats. We have that effect.

So we're not working just as man pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Here's the key. 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. We're actually serving Jesus. That's not exaggeration.

Jesus himself said that. If you remember back in, I think it's Matthew 25 or 26, Jesus is talking about judgment day. And he separated out humanity.

And the standard for judgment is, you people fed me. You people clothed me. You people visited me in prison. And they said, what?

[32 : 28] We did? When? I don't know what you're talking about. And the Lord says, if you did it to the least of these, you did it to me. So when you serve somebody, you're literally serving Jesus.

We need to remember that. And the other side of the judgment, what was that? You didn't visit me.

You didn't feed me. You didn't clothe me. You didn't give me drink. Why? Because you ignored.

You walked right past people who were in need.

You didn't serve me, Jesus said. So when we're at work, we should look at the people around us and think, I'm actually serving Jesus here.

Whether we look at our boss, our coworkers, our customers, even the annoying ones, especially the annoying ones, we're serving Jesus here. And here's an interesting flip that's also true.

We're serving Jesus. So I'm here. You're Jesus. But there's an equally true proposition where you are Jesus.

[33 : 32] Remember your identity. You're in Christ. You are Jesus to the people you serve.

Literally, you are Him. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

God has designed the world, the expansion of His kingdom, to speak through us. You are Jesus.

And if you're serving wholeheartedly, you're giving your best.

You're being aware of the needs of the people around you. You're lifting up your head to look and think. You are showing people this is who Jesus is.

When I worked at Amazon, there's two lessons here that I want you to get. Because it's really cool how God involves Himself in our lives. So I was working a horrible shift.

I went in at 6, got off at 4. 6 p.m., 4 a.m. Awful. And so I was in this job where I was just taking things out of a tote and shoving it into a shelving unit that was driven by artificial intelligence.

[34 : 36] By the way, working at Amazon proved to me we have nothing to fear from artificial intelligence. That thing broke down every day. But it was a very draining job.

And so, about a weekend, I was on my break and I sat down and I said, Lord, I'm not sure what my purpose here is. I want to serve these people, but I'm exhausted.

I'm in my station, I don't have exposure to other people, and I'm so tired, I don't want, I just want to sit and read a book for 15 minutes and then go back to the drudgery. So if you want me here to just make money, cool, I like money.

But if you want me here to make a difference, you got to change something. And I went back to work.

Come in the next day and there's a message on my computer that gave us directions to go see the manager. So I go to the manager, Will, and he says, congratulations, you're a water spider. Great.

[35 : 43] I have no idea what that means, which is probably what many of you are thinking. In a factory setting, a water spider is a person who is constantly in motion, that's why the name is there, a water spider walks on the surface of water because it never stops.

If a water spider stops moving in nature, it sinks and drowns. But if it's moving, it uses the surface tension of the water to stay safe where it needs to be and do its life.

So a water spider at Amazon is responsible to go from station to station to station to station and make sure that anything that would get in the way of the people working there is removed.

So I was removing their totes as they emptied them. I would bring them supplies as they needed them. I was constantly in motion. And I went to my manager a couple weeks later and said, why did you pick me to be a water spider?

I'm really curious. And you'll understand why I ask that question in a minute. Why did you pick me?

He goes, I have no idea. Your name popped up and I knighted you and you're a water spider.

[36 : 49] But here's why. Why? And this is the lesson I want you to hear.

God is at work in your life. I touched every person on that floor over and over and over every night. And I made it a point to get to know them. It's amazing what you can learn from somebody in a 30-second interaction. Where are you from? Cool. I'll be back. What did you like about living there? Cool. I'll be back. I discovered, for example, that we had a whole bunch of people from South Sudan that were refugees that were working for Amazon.

One of those guys and I got to be friends. One day his car broke down so I took him home from work. We were talking. He attended a Sudanese church in Omaha. Here's where it gets really cool.

[37 : 56] He was really excited because they were about to get the first edition of the New Testament in their language.

When I was a young, when I was a boy first coming to Christ, we prayed for the Sudan because they were considered an unreached people group. The people of that part of Africa. And now I get to meet I get to meet one of the first believers from that people group.

How cool is that? And I got to see God working to bring them His word in their language. What a privilege that God gives.

He doesn't just give that to me. He makes it available to all of us if we'll follow Him. I got to know another guy who was a refugee from Europe that he found out that I was a Christian and so we, a minute at a time, we had a running, started with a conversation in comparative theology between Islam and Catholicism and Hinduism and my Protestant beliefs and we just moved steadily until I shared the gospel with him, went point by point through the gospel, I bought him a Bible.

30 seconds at a time. My second to last day there, I had a young man stop me that I'd hardly talked to at all, a guy named Gavin and he said, you know, I've been watching you.

[39 : 37] I'm about to get married. Could you recommend some books to me on how to be a good husband? Because I don't have any idea. I come from a broken home, my dad's gone.

Could you tell me how to be a good husband? That's what happens when we enter the workplace and we live out our faith in Christ.

And there's one other piece of that that I want to give you from that story. that it's important for you to get. And I want to preface it by saying something that Paul said. Paul told in several places, he said, follow my example as I follow Christ.

And that's a precedent for me as a pastor, for Tim as a pastor, for John as a pastor, is we should be, we should live exemplary lives that are worthy of following.

And telling you the story, I don't want you to get the impression I'm trying to brag about me. This is God's work. But this is an example you should follow. Because not only did I have time to share the gospel with these people or find out about their relationship with God, but also, our floor under my leadership because I ended up in charge was the best.

[40 : 54] My team was characterized authorized by excellence. And they loved working for me. Why? Because I really believe this is true. I'm to obey my master, my employer.

I'm to do my very best. I'm to learn how to do the job and improve it. I need to love the people that are on my team. And as they were loved, they stepped up.

Interestingly, some stepped out. There were some who said, you're crazy. I don't want to work this hard. And they went back to the boring job of stowing shelves. But that's what a Christian should do in the workplace.

That's the impact we should have is that people see us serving Jesus and they recognize that they're in the presence literally of Jesus.

Because Christ in me, Christ in you, the hope of glory. We bring Jesus where we go. That's God's plan. And so, that's how we want to behave as an employee.

[42:01] And then, Jesus gives a warning. Actually, he gives a promise and a warning. Verse 24, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

So he reemphasizes that point. We get rewarded. I can tell you, you can tell. I got emotional talking about my time at Amazon. It's not something to get all teary and emotional about. It's drudgery and it's hard work.

But the relationships and serving the Lord and seeing God work, that's what gets me emotional. That's what I want you to see more than anything else. Is when we serve Jesus, nothing compares. It's so great to be in a place where we get to serve God and bring Jesus into the workplace and show people this is who Jesus is.

But then Paul gives a warning, for he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done and that without partiality. Right after Karen and I got married, I got a job working for one of our elders at Littleton Bible Chapel.

[43:09] He was the vice president of this hardware company, my friend Mike Douglas. First day, I clocked in, I'm the lowest man in the totem pole of this company that has about 80 employees. Mike Douglas wants to see you.

And so I go in, he sits me down, said, here's where the rubber meets the road, young man. I have hired five or six people recently from Littleton Bible Chapel and I have had to fire every one of them. They think that because they know me on Sunday morning that they can just kind of goof around and slack off. And it's affected my testimony in this building because their poor workmanship because of our prior relationship makes me look bad.

I'm not doing that again. So I'm starting with you on notice. You better be the best guy down in the role that I put you in and do it as unto the Lord or just go find another job.

Spare us the headaches. He was telling me what Paul was saying here. Don't think because you're a Christian you get a pass or because your boss is a Christian that you're going to pass.

[44:13] It doesn't work that way. That's a sign of immaturity. We have to do our work as for the Lord to glorify Him. Not because He's a taskmaster.

Not because He's so hard to please. But because we love Him. We want to give Him our best. And that's the way we need to approach it. By the way, I created kind of a problem for Mike.

I work really hard. But we learned that I'm really bad at making custom windows. and there's only so much work you can do with these worthless hands.

So I got moved into a different job. But we still need to give our best. That's what it looks like to be an employee. Is to serve as if we're serving Jesus.

To give our work unto the Lord. And we should be marked by excellence. Let me define what I mean by that and then we'll move on to employers.

[45:08] I am passionate about excellence. We often in our culture confuse excellence and perfection. They're not the same thing.

Perfection is keeping to a set of external rules. I tell you what you have to do and you have to meet this bar. And usually it's the same set of rules for everybody.

Regardless of your ability, your strengths, you've got to be perfect. perfect. That's not what we're asked to do. Instead, we are to pursue excellence.

Excellence is a cycle of improvement. This is a New Testament principle. To examine ourselves, that's actually a whole Bible principle. We have to examine ourselves. Look in the mirror.

James says that. Look in the mirror. Which is the perfect word of life. The Bible. How am I doing? What do I need to change? What better reflects to the world that I'm a follower of Jesus?

[46:07] How is the identity of Jesus lived out in my life? We need to be people who are examining ourselves and act on what we see. That's excellence.

God wants us to improve because as we improve, we better reflect His glory and we become more and more like Him and more and more secure and settled in our identity as someone who is in Christ.

Okay? So now let's look at verse 1 of chapter 4. Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness knowing that you too have a master in heaven. And this is pretty straightforward.

Paul didn't have to go into a great length with this. But justice and fairness, he's not just repeating the same concept twice using different words. There are actually two different things here.

So when he says grant to your slaves or to your employees, justice, it's doing what is ethical, what is morally right, and what is, what you're required to do for them legally.

[47:13] I'll give you an example that some of you may be able to relate to. Oftentimes, in our culture these days, people are hired as contract employees. A 1099 employee or a 1099 contractor.

What does that mean? Well, I've been hired to do a job. It might take a long time, but I'm just, I'm a contractor. So as long as I get that job done, I get paid, and it's beneficial for the employee or the contractor because they set their own hours and have a little bit more control into their finances. It's beneficial for the employer because they don't have to deal with the employment taxes. They don't have to deal with benefits. unless they just give the person the job and wind them up and turn them loose.

Here's the problem and this is unjust. Somebody will be hired as a 1099 employee but then be told, well, you need to be here at 8 o'clock. You have a half an hour at lunch between 1130 and 12 and you need to clock out at 5.

That's a violation of the law. That's an employee and if an employer, a master, treats somebody like, treats a 1099 contractor like an employee, well, then there's things you need to do for that employee and you're trying to dodge expenses by skirting the law.

[48:36] We don't do that. We have a responsibility as Christians, as Christian employers to know the law and if it costs us, well, it costs us because we're under authority that's justice.

What is the ethical thing to do for the people who work for me? What's the right thing to do? And as employers, we need to think about that. Again, going to that mirror, going to the Word of God, thinking through what and knowing the law.

Ignorance of the law is not an excuse. I'm not talking about the biblical law. I'm talking about the law of the jurisdiction in which you find yourself. City of Dubuque, County of Dubuque, State of Iowa, the United States.

We need to follow, know and follow the law for the benefit of our employees. We need to take care of them. But the fairness piece is bigger.

Grant your slaves justice and fairness. Now remember what I said earlier. In the first century, slaves were treated as property. I don't concern myself a whole lot with the rights and privileges of the chairs you're sitting on.

[49:45] I don't care. Are they functional? Great. Does this chair not functional? Pitch it. Get a new one. What Paul's saying is you can't treat people like that.

Fairness has to do with who they are. What do we know is true of every human being we cross paths with? They're creating the image of God. Every person you talk to today, regardless of their attitude, regardless of their behavior, regardless of the way they look.

Stunningly handsome or grotesque. They're an image bearer of the God who made them. And because of that, we should give them respect.

We should care for them because they're made in the image of God. That's their due. The other reason is Jesus died for the whole world.

Now, we have to receive Him as our Savior, but the cross establishes every person's value. And what is that value? The value is I, God speaking, love that person enough that I sent my son to die for him or her.

[51:03] So, if you're talking to somebody who's an image bearer, if you're talking to somebody who is worthy of Jesus dying on the cross for them, how are you going to treat them? How do you behave toward them?

If you think about that, there's a certain way we approach people regardless of their role. I read an illustration in one of Dallas Willard's books, The Divine Conspiracy, where Harvard was wrestling with their students who were in classes on business ethics not actually living those out in their real life.

And the example was of this young woman who was a student at Harvard, so she's a smart woman, but her family didn't have money and so to cover her costs, she was working cleaning other students' rooms.

And she had a classmate in the ethics class, top of the class, who continually propositioned her and had no problem with it.

He didn't draw the connection between his business ethics and his treatment of this person because he didn't see her as someone made in the image of God or someone for whom Christ had died.

[52:17] She's obviously less than me because she made my bed. She cleaned my bathroom. Therefore, she's less than. We don't behave like that as Christians. Everybody has dignity.

Everybody has a place. Everybody has a deeper story that frankly we should be trying to learn and dig out. So where do we land this?

And this is what I want to close with this morning. The marriage and family talk last week was about marriage and family, but it was also an illustration of how we bring our identity in Christ, the first 17 verses of chapter 3, into the real life nitty-gritty of who we are, how we behave out in the world.

This example of masters and slaves, employer-employee, is another illustration. This is how people whose identity is in Christ, this is how we behave.

And we need to be looking in the mirror to learn and to change our behavior so that we're changing. I want to go back to a paradox we talked about a few weeks ago.

[53:29] Paul says rules are of no value, and you might be thinking, John, you just gave me rules. How is what you're saying not just different rules?

I'll tell you how. I was talking with a friend of mine, several friends of mine, but one in particular, over the last couple of days about abiding in Christ. John 15.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? To live in Him. It's this. It's having an ongoing conversation with Jesus about, God, what does this look like?

How do I be a good husband, a good wife, a good father, a good child? How does that apply in the rest of my life as I go out in the world? What does that look like? To love well, to submit well, to not exasperate people.

To ask the Lord Jesus to show you, whether through His Word, through circumstances, through somebody else speaking to you, that you listen and take it as a message from God.

[54:40] In two weeks, we're going to talk about the next section of Colossians is on prayer. prayer. You've heard me say this before, prayer is not, now I lay me down to sleep.

Prayer is not repeating the Lord's Prayer by rote. Prayer is a dynamic relationship with God in which we're communicating back and forth.

And I want to tell you very strongly, God speaks to us. God replies. my experience at Amazon is just one example.

And I'm not special. I'm not different. Well, some would say I am different, but that's a different conversation. I'm willing.

I'm listening. And what I want to ask you, I'm going to ask you again in two weeks, are you listening? Do you have an expectation that when I pray, God, what do you want me to do here? I'm willing, but I can't do it.

[55:42] Or I don't know how. Or I don't understand. Do you have an expectation that God's going to say, good question, I'm glad you asked. Hey, by the way, do you know I love you? Cool. Okay, we've got that established.

Let's talk about what needs to change and what it means to live out your identity in Christ. And what you're going to discover along the way is the adventure of following Jesus.

It is fun. there's been times in our lives where we've thought, okay, what is the Lord going to do next? There's a hilarity about a walk with God that's intimate, where he just puts people in our path who can bless us or we can bless.

Usually it's both ways. So I want to challenge you as you think about these last two weeks, it's rooted in your identity in Christ.

Christ, Jesus lives in you and he's calling you to look like him. Wait, we may have heard that somewhere. We exist to glorify God.

[56:51] Sound familiar? Walking closely with him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day. Oh wait, that's our mission statement. That's Ephesians 4. We need to live that out and Jesus is walking with us in that process.

It's so cool and I want you to experience that. That's the gospel lived out. Let's pray together. God, thank you that we don't have to muscle up.

We don't have to try and force ourselves into a mold but instead we're walking with you, we're learning from you, we're experiencing a life in Christ.

I pray for every person here that we would think about how marriage relationships and work relationships actually provide a road map for how we're supposed to bring you into every conversation we have, every relationship.

God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.