

“A Charge to Slaves”
Colossians 3:22-25
(Preached at Trinity, November 25, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 3** has a high emphasis upon the transforming effect of the Gospel. Our whole life is lived in the light of Christ.
Beginning with **Verse 18** Paul describes the practical effect of God's transforming grace upon the family – wives & husbands, children & parents; and then Paul adds slaves & masters.
Strong families are the bedrock for any society. The ills of any society can be traced to a weakened family. Crime, substance abuse and poverty can all be traced to the weakened institution of the family. This is why Paul puts a high emphasis on the importance of the family.
2. Paul begins with the institution of marriage – the relationship of husbands and wives, because this is where the family begins.
Paul's instruction to married couples:
“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as fitting in the Lord.”
“Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.”
3. In **Verse 20** Paul turned his focus upon children. This teaching follows reasonably and logically after Paul's instruction on marriage. Children are the fruit of marriage.
Paul gives the command, “Children, be obedient” in the imperative.
Then he adds, “for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”
4. Then in **Verse 21** Paul speaks to parents:
Colossians 3:21 NAU - "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart."
Good parenting helps to train and equip the members of the next generation. Great emphasis must be placed upon training them well.
5. Now, Paul turns to slaves and masters. As I've said before, we are moving parallel to Paul's teaching to the church of Ephesus.
Colossians 3:22 NAU - "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth"
Ephesians 6:5-6 NAU - "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."
In both Ephesians and Colossians, this charge to slaves and then masters is in the context of a passage dealing exclusively with the family. This may seem strange to us today, but it would not have been strange at all in first century culture where slavery was common place.

6. Slavery is difficult for us to identify with today, especially considering the slavery in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- A. Slavery was very much accepted in the 1st century. It was a normal part of life.
1. Slaves were seen as necessary for an ordered society
 2. There were an estimated 60 million slaves in the Roman empire - they probably formed the whole of the work force - free men did not labor
 3. Included among slaves were not only common laborers but also teachers, doctors, and other professional people. Many were actually better educated than their masters—yet they had no rights. They were merely the property of their owners existing solely for the comfort and convenience of the master.
 4. We should note the context of the Colossian church where Philemon was a member. Paul is already setting up his letter to Philemon where he admonishes him to receive back his runaway slave, Onesimus. Paul commends Onesimus.
Colossians 4:9 NAU - "Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*"
Philemon 1:10-11 NAU - "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, ¹¹ who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me."
 5. Onesimus would be one of the two entrusted with delivering this letter to Colossae, which shows the close connection between this letter and Paul's letter to Philemon. It is likely this letter was read in the home of Philemon.
Colossians 4:7-9 NAU - "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here."
- C. In the Roman culture there were often domestic slaves who were given responsibility for the care and training of the children. Paul alludes to this in Galatians
Galatians 3:24-26 NAU - "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."
The word translated "tutor" is the Greek word παιδαγωγός which literally refers to a pedagogue or one given authority to train up the children.
7. Paul's focus throughout this entire portion of this epistle is to stress the great change Christianity brings upon a person.
Colossians 3:9-10 NAU - "since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him"
Colossians 3:17 NAU - "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

8. Paul's charge to the slaves was: "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth"
Paul has in mind things pleasant as well as things unpleasant; when the master is agreeable and when he is not. Obviously, Paul is not referring to all things absolutely.
Acts 5:29 NAU - "We must obey God rather than men."
9. As we consider this passage on slaves and masters there are several important things we need to take to heart.
 - I. First of all, the NT doesn't place an emphasis upon this world's system
This must be stressed in our hyper-political culture today.
 - A. The NT always directs our eyes beyond this present world
Colossians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."
 1. The primary focus of the Gospel is not with cultural or political change.
In **Romans 13** Paul commands us to obey the civil authorities without giving any commentary regarding the wickedness of the Roman emperor
 2. The NT neither condemns or condones slavery
It simply recognizes its existence.
 - a. We should not presume that God is in any way pleased with the concept of one man owning another. Nor should we dismiss the sinfulness of the 19th Century in our own country that was race based and dependent upon the evils of the slave trade.
 - b. The slaves spoken of here in **Colossians 3** were largely domestic slaves serving within the household. There were ways slaves could gain their freedom.
 3. Christianity doesn't focus upon outward circumstance but upon the condition of the heart. We are charged to live holy lives before Christ. The New Testament focuses mostly on the proper behavior of slaves and masters rather than on the ethical issues of slavery itself. Masters didn't free their slaves but the treatment of their slaves was transformed. And the work ethic of their slaves was transformed.
1 Peter 2:18 NAU - "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable."
 4. William Hendriksen writes:
"The ill-will, dishonesty, and laziness of the slave would be replaced by willing service, integrity, and industry; the cruelty and brutality of the master, by considerateness and love. And a new and gloriously transformed society would replace the old."¹
 5. We must always be the salt and light in this world which means we often shine upon the darkness of this world. We want to serve faithfully in this world but we are not primarily of this world. This world and our condition in this world are not primary. God is primary - God is first, heaven is first.

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 6:173.

6. We can see this with Daniel. He served faithfully for the good of the Babylonian authorities, but his greatest interest was upon serving Yahweh. We never find him wailing against the Babylonian government. He lived and served faithfully in a pagan world, while maintaining his absolute allegiance to God.
 7. This is an important truth for many Christians in our generation
 - a. Many today give an unhealthy emphasis on politics as if a particular political party winning an election will solve the problems of this world.
 - b. Their passions are continually being raised over this issue or that issue.
 - c. We must never forget that we are citizens of another kingdom
John 18:36 NAU - "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."
 8. It doesn't mean we have no interest in the political realm.
 - a. We are interested in who sits as president or who comprises the Supreme Court. We should desire and work for justice and righteousness.
 - b. Paul commands us to pray for our leaders.
1 Timothy 2:1-3 NAU - "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior"
 - c. We don't isolate ourselves from this world. But we must never forget we serve a master of a different realm. This is Paul's point here:
Ephesians 6:5 NAU - "be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh"
 - d. We have earthly masters but our ultimate Master is Christ. We do all things with an eye upon Him.
- B. The primary focus of the church is to evangelize and bring people to a knowledge of Christ, not to reform the world
1. This world cannot be reformed. Only the Gospel can transform lives. The ultimate solution will be the purging of this world
 2. We are never taught in the NT to give our energy towards reforming this world. Rather we are to give ourselves to holiness.
2 Peter 3:10-14 NAU - "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking

for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴
Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,"

3. We must always maintain a proper relationship to the world
We must see life in this world as a temporary pilgrimage in which we give ourselves in service to Christ as we serve one another.
4. The ultimate freedom is our deliverance from sin. Jesus Christ has paid our ransom and set us free.

C. We must submit ourselves to our earthly masters while recognizing we are servants of Christ.

1 Peter 2:13-16 NAU - "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵ For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. ¹⁶ Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God."

1. These instructions were given when the powers that be was none other than the cruel tyrant Nero
2. They were simply commanded to submit

II. The second thing we must understand from this passage is that Christianity does not dissolve existing relationships

A. There was confusion here among the early Christians

1. Some thought that since God saved them they should leave their unbelieving spouses - Paul said NO! –

1 Corinthians 7:10-13 NAU - " But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away."

Instead, Christianity transforms the relationship

1 Corinthians 7:14 NAU - "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy."

2. Slaves often resented their masters, especially their Christian masters retaining their position.

a. After all, aren't we all equal in Christ?

Galatians 3:28 NAS - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

- b. They expected preferential treatment.
This is partly what Paul is referring to in **Verse 25**. While we don't divorce it from the previous verse Paul is reminding the believing slaves that if they behave improperly in their service to their earthly master they should not expect preferential treatment.
Colossians 3:25 NAU - "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."
- c. Equality in Christ does not mean equality every earthly relationship. It does not remove all positions of authority.
Wives are to submit to themselves to their husbands.
Civil magistrates have the rule of law.
Church elders have ecclesiastical authority
Children are to obey their parents
Slaves are to obey their masters
Colossians 3:22 NAU - "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth"
- 3. Paul's instruction regarding our particular situation of life for us to remain content where God has placed us.
 - a. Onesimus had fled his master Philemon - Paul sent him back and beseeched Philemon to receive him back. Paul didn't command Philemon to free his slave.
 - e. If freedom became a possibility, great! Otherwise, be content in the place Christ has placed you.
1 Corinthians 7:21-24 NAU - "Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. ²² For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that *condition* in which he was called."
- B. Rather than abolishing our situation of life the Gospel transforms it
 - 1. Rather than abolishing slavery Christianity changes it - The slave is placed upon a new plane – his focus is no longer primarily upon his earthly condition but how it might be used to glorify Christ.
 - 2. In addition the master no longer treats his servant as mere property but as a brother

Conclusion:

1. Paul is reminding us of the wonder of our union with Christ. Everything in our life is transformed. If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. If we are risen with Christ we are now to seek the things above.
2. Do you see your life this way?
Too often we direct all of our focus upon our earthly condition. Too often we direct all of our focus upon ourselves: our rights, our happiness, our ambitions. The Christian is to maintain focus upon Christ.
Colossians 3:17 NAU - "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."
3. **Verse 23** is interesting. Most translations translate the last clause as an indicative or a simple statement. But the verb can also be translated as an imperative.
In the imperative it would read: "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, be slaves of the Lord Christ."
We must never diminish that it is Christ whom we serve.
4. This passage on slaves and masters has further application for us. Next week we'll look at how this applies to our earthly labors. We'll look at the Biblical teaching on work.