

**Christ is All and in All
Paul's Call for a Christ-centered Home
Masters and servants**

Intro: Clearly we can see in Paul's exhortations to the Colossians that he addressed households as they existed in the 1st century culture. In the Greek "oikos" (household) there were husbands, wives, children, and slaves. These components suggest three distinct relationships: the husband-wife relationship; the parent-child relationship and the master-slave relationship.

In studying the Bible it is important that we first ask, "What did the message mean to those who first heard it". And then we must ask, "How do I apply this message in my time?" With goal in mind, we see that Paul teaches that:

A Christ-centered home has obedient slaves.

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. 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 will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (Colossians 3:22-25)

Notice that slaves also were commanded to "obey" their masters. Paul uses the same word again that he used of the children—"to fully hear, and thus to obey". But here he adds several phrases to describe the Christ-centered nature of this obedience:

It is sincere

...not with external service (that is, mere outward display as those who please men who cannot see what is inside)

...but with sincerity of heart (The Greek term indicates "singleness" of heart, no duplicity about it, knowing that the Lord can see what we are inside)

and out of respect for the Lord whom they also served.

It is hearty

The Greek expression "ek psyche" might be literally translated "out of the soul", i.e. coming from one's inward being.

The quality and quantity of the work was to reflect their regard for the one for whom they were working. Thus, the effort would be commensurate with the fact that it was done for Jesus rather than merely for a man and that it was for His reward and not merely for earthly compensation.

Paul's commands solved what masters of the Greco-Roman world complained about most often, namely, that slaves were lazy and unmotivated in doing their work.

A Christ-centered home has just masters.

Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. (Col. 4:1)

The command is much more brief, but very important. The master's use of his authority must also be Christ-centered, providing justice and fairness to their slaves. In the ancient world, since slaves were considered property, they were often treated cruelly and misused. God's order affirms the fundamental rights of slaves as human beings in need of basic provisions for life.

Two important questions raised by our text

Why didn't the apostles campaign against slavery or incite slaves to rebel?

It is often the case that we tend to view the ancient world in terms of our own experiences and knowledge. Having seen in our own society the historical battle over slavery and the constitutional amendment affirming the freedom of each individual we may wonder why the Scriptures deal with slavery as it did. Here are some things to keep in mind:

There was no obvious physical difference between a slave and a freeman. One would not have been able to identify a slave in this way.

Many slaves were far better off than freemen in the Roman world. Free peasants might have suffered far more than a Roman slave, many of whom used their attachment to their wealthy masters to advance themselves in society and even gain their freedom. In some cases, slaves themselves owned slaves.

Slavery was an integral part of the economy of the Roman world. Slave labor provided the means by which the whole economy functioned. Someone suggested that calling for the eradication of slavery in the NT era would have been somewhat comparable to someone today arguing for the abolition of the automobile in our society.

Christians many of whom were slaves had little political power in the first century political world and would have not have had a platform to effect this change in Roman society.

However as the gospel's message permeated society the created equality of all would have been seen and the principle of the restoration of all things to the created order would have eventually led to the abolition of slavery.

How can we apply this teaching in our restructured world?

Though slavery as a component of a socio-economic system has been eradicated, Paul's exhortations still have value to us in comparable circumstances. When we go to our jobs, we need to take with us a Christ-centered work ethic.

As workers, our work should be internally motivated.

The quality/quantity of our work should reflect an effort worthy of the Lord to whom it is offered.

*If we supervise others, we do so with justice and fairness
knowing that we too need fairness and justice from the Lord.*

Conclusion: Though in our modern world, we would no longer think of the household as consisting of servants, the principles of this text have age-lasting significance. When Christ is all and in all, it will affect not only affect our homes but also how we conduct ourselves at our jobs each day.