

If you live 78 years (the average life-span of Americans) do you know how many hours you will have slept?

I figured it out, you don't need to - nearly 200,000 hours (at 7/hrs/night)

There's no activity in life in which you will spend more time.

In what activity will you likely spend the next most number of hours?

You probably guessed it - work, 80,000 hours.

Never mind the comparison of 200,000 hours sleeping and only 80,000 hours working, 80,000 hours of work is a lot of labor.

Work is one of the biggest issues in our lives.

And work, whether it is in the home, the office, the school, the plant, the field or on the road, can be a source of a lot of satisfaction but it can also be the source of a great deal of dissatisfaction.

Some surveys reveal as many as 60-70% of American workers consider their jobs unsatisfying.

Now, I hope that's not you but let's face it, while there may be parts of our jobs that are challenging and energizing, the truth is there are many aspects of even good jobs that are mundane and just plain hard to work up much enthusiasm for.

I did some rough calculations and discovered that between a husband and a wife, with three children, even if only one works outside the home, during their lifetime they will do:

- 23,000 commutes to work,
- 40,000 clean-ups after meals,
- 5,000 car-trips taking kids to activities,
- 10,000 loads of laundry,
- 3,000 times vacuuming the floor (I've got mine in!)
- 11,000 work reports
- 130,000 phone calls,
- 85,000 pieces of mail opened (not counting work mail)
- and change 16,000 diapers.

There is a lot about work that is fairly routine and uninspiring.

But I think for most people what causes the greatest problems in work are not the tasks but the relationships.

It's the people that make many jobs difficult for others.

And as often as not, we perceive it is our supervisor, our boss that makes it so hard.

And even if we haven't personalized our criticism to one man or woman who supervises us, we are tempted to have a critical attitude toward "them" - those people who make the rules and decisions that we see negatively affecting us on the job.

If only "they" would do things differently - our jobs would be so much better.

One of the easiest things in life is to fall into a carping, critical attitude toward those in authority over us.

God through the Apostle Paul calls us to a different attitude - to different actions as His people in the work place.

Please look with me at our text for today - beginning at Colossians 3:22.

Last week, this week and next week we are looking at three specific examples of how our new lives as Christians are lived out in the real world.

Last week we looked at verses 18 & 19 and thought about the relationship of husbands and wives.

Next week, Father's Day, we will look at verses 20 & 21 and think about father-child relationships.

This week, as you can tell from the Bible passage I've noted, we will think together about the relationship of employees and employers.

Some of you might think to yourselves, "The text doesn't say 'employees and employers', it says 'slaves and masters'."

You're right. But consider, if the principles here taught apply to the slave-master relationship they most certainly would apply to the employee-employer relationship.

For if Christian slaves can be called upon to have these attitudes how much more likely would Christian employees, considering their freedoms, be called upon to have these same attitudes.

What attitudes?

I'm already defending the idea that these verses apply to us, as well as to slaves in the first century, and we haven't even see what they are yet!

If you will look carefully at verses 22-25 I think you will agree that we could outline the text as follows:

The basic imperative, the command, in verse 22, is:  
"Obey your earthly masters in everything."

Then the rest of verse 22 sets up a contrast:

How not to act in your obedience and how to act in your obedience:  
HOW NOT? Not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor.

HOW TO? But instead, with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

Then in verse 23 he harkens back to verse 17.

READ 23 and then 17

IN verse 23 he is going to underscore the basic principle that enables you to relate to your boss in the way he has called on you to relate.

Continuing with the outline look at verses 24 and 25:

He concludes the instruction to employees, reminding them of rewards, positive and negative for obeying this instruction. READ

So we have the basic command,  
a refining of what he means by it,

a principle that enables us to do it,

and a reminder of the benefits or losses for heeding or not heeding this instruction.

Just as last week, before we look at the specifics of these verses today, I want you to look at the context of this command from the Lord:

It is estimated that there were over 60 million slaves in the Roman empire at the time of the writing of this book.

You talk about lousy working conditions, some of these slaves were in nearly impossible situations. They had no rights.

A great many slaves had, apparently, become Christians.

They had become part of the church.

But just because they became Christians didn't mean their working conditions changed.

But God through the Apostle Paul, in this letter, was writing to these slaves as much as he was writing to masters or other free men and women.

"Now that you belong to Christ, (chap 3:1), now that you have been raised with Christ and know forgiveness of sins and a new kind of life in Him, (verse 5) I want you to put to death, to put away the old ways of living and relating to people.

Verse 8, I want you to rid yourself of anger, rage, malice, etc. don't lie.

Verse 12, Instead I want you to clothe yourself, to put on a whole different way of relating to people: compassion, kindness, humility etc.

Then when we come to verses 18 and following, it is as if the Apostle says, now this instruction about having entirely different attitudes and actions isn't just abstract, religious thinking - it has application in the real relationships of life: marriage, family and work.

IN this issue of our attitudes toward work and especially our attitudes toward our supervisors, I think Paul gets intensely practical.

First of all, notice again, he says "obey your earthly masters in everything". This word "obey" is a strong word. It means "do it".

"in everything" means it would be a clear exception for you to disobey. Your basic disposition is to obey BUT There are limits on the boss's authority.

Notice Paul says obey "your earthly masters".

You have a Boss (the Lord) with more authority than your earthly boss.

And you are not under command to obey what is immoral or illegal.

Neither do we have to be passive in the face of unjust treatment. It is certainly right for a slave or an unfairly treated employee to seek to change his/her situation but these verses speak clearly about the need for a person to do so with a Christian attitude.

In spite of all of those exceptions, notice that the basic command remains: OBEY those in authority over you.

As I said last week, according to the Scriptures, everyone is under some kind of authority: government, school, church and many of us are under authority in our jobs.

What is your basic posture toward authority: rebellion or acceptance?

One of the most common evidences of rebellion is complaining - complaining about the job, about the company, about the rules, about the boss.

The bases of the complaints may be valid but the Christian is called on to approach it from a whole different perspective - not rebellion.

"Obey your earthly masters." Yield willingly to authority.

Now after stating what is to be our basic disposition (willing obedience), the Apostle gets very even more specific:

In your obedience, here's how you are not to act and how you are to act.

In your obedience there are two things you are not to do:

First you are not to obey only when your boss's eye is on you.

That's hypocrisy - pretending something that isn't true.

Pretending you are a diligent, faithful employee when you aren't.

During my undergraduate years I drove a truck in Chicago.

It was my and my helper's job to distribute equipment all over the area, from a central warehouse.

We and other drivers and helpers would load up our trucks and then take off to do our deliveries.

The minute we left the warehouse, the boss could no longer see what we were doing.

The things that I heard and witnessed about how grown men cheated that company were appalling.

Claiming to be stuck in traffic when they were having coffee, intentionally working very slowly so as not to have to take out another load later in the day, claiming injuries that were unreal, were common practice.

Earlier I had worked for the equivalent of Public Service in Chicago.

I was a meter reader.

There were dozens of us working out of just one of the locations.

Each morning we would be given a list of addresses to which we were to go to read the electric meters, and then sent on our way until late afternoon.

The union stewards, in order to insure more jobs, demanded that we work slowly and then only after we had spent time with the rest of the boys having coffee for nearly two hours after we left the office.

They had it set up so that the longest day I actually worked was four hours even though I was paid for eight.

By their demand, we couldn't go back to the office until late in the afternoon, giving the impression we had worked eight hours.

I talked to my boss about it but he told me not to rock the boat.

One enterprising young man went through four years of day classes in college while on the job.

The company found out when he graduated.

Keeping an open magazine in the top drawer of the desk to read when the boss isn't looking is wrong.

An acquaintance of mine tells of a friend who had two seminary students working for him.

It was later reported to him that one of them, after spending a long time in the restroom, said to the other student that he "was able to read five chapters of John in the john."

Paul says, "No, that's not how you obey!"

He also says, you don't obey just to win the boss's favor.

This can't mean you aren't supposed to do a good job that will make your boss happy.

But if your reason for obeying, for doing a good job is to find favor with your boss two problems may emerge:

One, you will find your success and fulfillment in work only in your boss's favor - and you ought to know that is elusive.

Your satisfaction in work will be at the mercy of your boss.

God does not want you trapped in that.

If you have an affirming, encouraging boss you will feel your work is satisfying but pity you if your boss is unaffirming or even unfair.

If your motivation for doing a good job or your valuing of your work is based on the boss's favor, it will likely be a miserable job.

A second problem that may result from working to win the boss's favor is that you may tend to hypocrisy again.

When seeking the boss's favor you are not truly interested in the boss, you are not truly interested in doing a good job, you are only working to selfishly fulfill your own desires - to win favor.  
Your motivation for working is get for yourself.

In other sermons we have seen that work is not a curse.  
Work is a God-given activity whereby people worship God.  
If you go back to Genesis 1 you will discover that work was a part of what it means to be human - it was a way of reflecting God's image in us.  
To work was to honor God - to be what he created humans to be.

Work is worship.  
Honorable work done with the right attitude is a means of worshipping God.

Therefore working just to curry favor with other humans is to miss the point of work - Currying favor with others means we have fallen into self-centered hypocrisy.

Rather than going any further with how we are not to obey, I want us to look at how Paul says we are to obey.

In the last part of v 22 he says, obey "with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord."

These two phrases strike me as the exact opposites of the two ways we are NOT to obey.

Instead of hypocrisy, obeying only when the boss is looking, we are to obey with "sincerity".

This first phrase is literally two words "single hearted" - sincere.

There is no duplicity here, no hypocrisy.

What you see is what you get.

If eight hours is what you pay them for, eight hours is what they work.

If you ask them to do something, you can expect they will do it.

These people don't feign respect for authority, they don't pretend it - they have respect for the authority over them.

Sincere!

The next phrase about how an obedient worker is to act starts to get at the heart of this whole issue.

We are to obey "with reverence for the Lord".

Earlier Paul had written our motivation to obey ought not to be just to win favor with the boss.

Now here he says what our motivation is - JESUS.

We don't work to please others, we work to please our Lord.

Can we truly approach all jobs with a sense that we are doing them for the Lord?

Can we take classes in algebra, chemistry, history and English, doing it for the Lord?

Can we really drive truck for Jesus?

Can we check groceries, scrub floors, sell Arby's, type letters, make investments, teach school and sell insurance for the Lord.

For many of us there is still in the back of our minds the idea that somehow some tasks on earth are holier than others.

We can think of being a missionary, a pastor, a seminary professor, a Sunday School teacher for Jesus - those are sacred jobs.

But being a lawyer, a milkman, a homemaker, a secretary, an accountant - those are secular jobs.

It was Martin Luther, more than anyone else, who overthrew the idea that some jobs were holier than others.

He said, "Household tasks have no appearance of sacredness; and yet these very works in connection with the household are more desirable than all the works of all the monks and nuns."

Another Reformer, William Tyndale wrote that if we look on the outward appearance of things, "There is a difference between washing dishes and preaching of the word of God, but as touching how it pleases God, there is no difference at all between the two.

All honorable work is to be done obediently not hypocritically but sincerely, not currying favor with others but seeking to respect the wishes of our Lord.

There is a part of us that doesn't like this teaching.

Still clinging to the idea that there is a difference between the sacred and the secular, we will admit God's right to expect things of us when it comes to how we do the "sacred" things of life - our religious duties.

But when it comes to our jobs - there we want to like what we like and dislike what we dislike.

If we're getting a raw deal from our boss, we reserve the right to have a bad attitude.

In fact, we cherish that right.

Griping is part of free speech isn't it?

Why should I want to have the kind of attitude toward authority at work that Paul teaches here?

I may not like my boss, I may not respect his or her authority, I may not like my job but I'm getting along - why should I want to change?

I suspect there were slaves in that congregation in Colosse, to whom Paul was writing this book, that had been mistreated all their lives.

If ever a group had a right to a bad attitude, it would have been them.

And yet it is to them that Paul writes these words calling on them to have sincere obedience.

Our attitude in our place of work is not an option for the Christian.

According to verses 24 and 25 we will be held to a strict accounting.

And with what has already been written, the accounting will not only be for whether we obeyed but with what attitude we obeyed.

The Christian who obeys his earthly master with sincerity and reverence for the Lord, rather than hypocrisy and selfish favor seeking - such a person can expect a reward when Jesus comes again.

And the Christian who does wrong in this regard can expect to be repaid for his wrong.

Why should I want to do what God is instructing here?

Well, this is fairly simple, fundamental but also very clear -

When Jesus comes again, how we have acted in this life, even in regard to our attitudes at work, will make a difference.

From the rest of Scripture we know this cannot mean that we either earn or lose our salvation based on these actions of ours.

But I can't get away from the simple meaning of the words that obedience in this matter of attitude toward authority at work can result in either a positive reward or in a sense of loss.

READ II Cor 5:10

When we stand before Jesus Christ at his return we will realize as never before how significant it was that we obeyed him in this life - Then we will know it was worth it to sincerely obey our earthly masters even when we didn't feel like it.

Likewise there will be a sense of great shame at how little regard we gave to his word in this area of life - not considering how important respect for authority is to Jesus.

For if you show me a man or a woman who is disrespectful to authority at work, I will show you a man or a woman who is probably struggling with authority everywhere - including the authority of Christ.

It takes maturity to act now in ways that we know will only much later bear results. To work humbly, sincerely, obediently for my boss, knowing there is nothing in it for me now, but only much later when Jesus comes - that takes maturity.

BUT reward later, when Jesus comes, may not be the only reason we should want to obey this command of the Lord to obey our earthly masters.

In verse 23 I see an immediate reward for working this way.

Some of us get into negative situations at work or work for bosses that are difficult and we allow that to turn us into negative, griping, angry people.

And our negativism about work begins to affect every other area of life.

You see, the truth about our attitudes toward work is that we are often working for ourselves and when anyone is perceived as getting in our way, we are irritated and angry and unchanged that turns to bitterness.

Work becomes drudgery and life becomes dull - we are out to serve ourselves and the whole world seems against us.

BUT Verse 23 READ

"With all your heart" means "from the soul".

Enter into your work from your soul.

Be a person who lives each minute of life.

Too many of us "get through" the day. We "cope" with the situation.

We kind of go in neutral through parts of life.

We miss so much because are blindly, thoughtlessly going through the motions, or negatively and angrily complying with someone else's wishes.

But God says, "No, that's not how I want you to work. Whatever you are doing, I want you to do it wholeheartedly for Me."

Every piece of work a Christian does is a present to God.

Now it occurs to me that this instruction only makes sense, it only has any appeal, if you truly love God.

I have watched four year olds in Sunday school making valentines for their mothers.

Their brows are furrowed, their eyes are intense, their tongues are clasped in their lips as they etch each line of the card.

From past experience they can anticipate their mother's excitement and pleasure when she receives this masterpiece.

They have entered wholeheartedly, from their souls, into the project because they are doing it not just because their teacher said to but because it is for their mothers.

Work somehow changes when we cease doing it for ourselves, when we cease doing it even just for the boss, but we begin doing it for the Lord.

And when work changes, life itself begins to change.