

“Divine Grace In the Daily Grind”

Colossians 3:22-4:1; Ephesians 6:5-9

Take your Bible this morning and turn with me to the third chapter of Colossians, where we will read in a minute from verses 20-21. Since the beginning of chapter 3, Paul has been giving us a well-balanced description of the Christian life. In the first eight verses, he has dealt with the Christian and Christ. And then in verses 9-17, he has dealt with the Christian and the local church. In verses 18-21, he deals with the Christian and his family. And now, from verse 22 into the next chapter, he deals with the Christian and his daily work. Before we look at that, there's a scene you will remember in the classic Disney movie 'Snow White' where the seven dwarves are marching off to the mines to work, and they're singing, 'Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's off to work we go!' I imagine that for most folks today, it could well be, "I owe! I owe! It's off to work I go!" Mortgages, children in college, or car payments. We go to work to earn a living, to get a paycheck. And while that is certainly important, we'll see from these verses how work is an opportunity for you and me to bring glory to God and to advance His mission in the world.

In this third chapter of Colossians, the apostle Paul has been making the point that the gospel impacts all of life and relationships—marriage, the family, and work. Remember how he has explained in verse 17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." We're to glorify God in the details of life. And he then mentions what this looks like in the most fundamental relationships that we have—husbands and wives, children and parents, and then bondservants and masters. Or to express it in our modern understanding, employees and their employers. (Read)

It would be impossible for us to fully describe those ways in which Christianity has changed the world. Christians living out their faith in practical and productive ways, and whose influence has shaped society. One such individual was a man named Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852). He was the son of a Lutheran pastor who, as a child, often helped his dad in the family garden. When he was a young man, his Christian beliefs convinced him that children need to learn about God and His world at an early age. One day while he was out hiking, Friedrich envisioned a school for young children that would allow their minds to be cultivated by a teacher like a farmer cultivates a garden. So he called his idea 'the child's garden,' or 'kindergarten' in German. But it all started with a Christian idea.

Or, if we went further back to the third century, there was a man named Basil of Caesarea who argued that Christians must care for the poor because Jesus identifies with them according to Matthew 25. Every person bears God's image and deserves dignity, and he believed that healing the sick is a ministry of the church. He preached a famous sermon on the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12 and rebuked wealthy Christians for hoarding wealth instead of funding mercy ministry. Basil then used his own inheritance to construct what became known as St. Basil's Basileias. Historians widely recognize it as the birth of the hospital as we understand it, and it was this model that spread throughout the world.

These are just but two examples of Christians in history who took their faith into the marketplace and changed the world. It has been Christians who've established hospitals, started schools, built orphanages, reformed prisons, and abolished slavery. Christians who declare Christ's gospel with their mouths and demonstrate it with their muscles. It is the same today with those who see their occupations as filled with purpose beyond a paycheck, or more than just a

means to make money. In the time remaining, let's look at this very important text in Colossians 3 and see what Paul says about the Christian's daily grind and the way in which he or she is to go about it:

1 – The ASSIGNMENT in which we work (3:22)

“Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.”

Our job involves an assignment with which we've been entrusted by God. And those assignments are wide and diverse. Paul is speaking to 'bondservants' in verse 22, and then he speaks to 'masters' in verse 1 of the next chapter. Before we look at the instructions given here in this text, we need to see them in context. Remember that Paul has been explaining the practical ways that Christ makes a difference in our lives. It's within this context that he addresses bondservants and masters. These are archaic expressions that relate to a social order which no longer exists. Now, we tend to think of slavery through the lens of 19th century slavery in America. Despite similarities slavery in the ancient world was different. In the Roman Empire, roughly half the population was in slavery to the other half. In cities like Rome, all the work was done by slaves rather than citizens. Slavery wasn't based on race. People of all ethnicities became slaves by birth, through conquest, or for economic reasons. Christianity would eventually turn the system on its head. So that as a movement, Christianity began among the lowest rungs of society. And as it spread, it transformed society so that the entire social order would be changed. It is important for us to understand that Paul is not arguing for the dismantling of a system as much as he is the dignity of people. He didn't consider slaves to be inferior. Rather, he insists here that as those made in the

image of God, they are to be treated fairly and justly. That ethic would change the world.

Kent Hughes — *“The instruction Paul gives here was ultimately revolutionary, because in time it brought the downfall of slavery as an institution. But it was also immediately revolutionary in that it brought fullness to the Christian’s life, whether slave or master.”*

In Christ, there is no longer any distinctions such as slave, free, and so on. But what he will say to bondservants and masters has a modern application for those who work for someone else as well as those who employ someone else. And so this is a text about our work assignment and the way we go about it. For a lot of people, ‘work’ is a four letter word! Maybe they’re in a job they don’t enjoy. Or maybe they work in a difficult environment with difficult people. Maybe they fail to see how what they do is making an impact. I’m afraid this is the experience of a lot of people. There are those who are so immersed in their work that they are what can be called ‘workaholics.’ And then there are those who try to avoid work at all costs, what Proverbs refers to as a ‘ sluggard.’ Idolatry on one hand, and idleness on the other. The key is understanding and seeing work from a biblical perspective.

God designed work

Work is God’s idea. Going all the way back to creation, we are able to see how this is the case. God created man and then entrusted him with an assignment. And the Bible says that when God made man and woman, He put them in a garden and endowed them with purpose and responsibility.

Genesis 2:15 — **“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”**

To ‘work’ something is to make it flourish, and to ‘keep’ at something is to sustain it. So that the Lord essentially said to Adam, “I’m calling you to be productive and industrious, and I’m giving you dominion over My creation.” That’s our responsibility. But we make the observation from Genesis 1 that we get our label before our labor. Which is to say that before we are told what to do, we are told who we are. For instance:

Genesis 1:26-28—“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

That’s our purpose. To be created in the image of God is to reflect His character, to mirror and reflect Him throughout the world. For example, when we talk about a young man being the spitting image of his father, it simply means that he reminds us of his father in likeness. That’s the way it is supposed to be with man made in the image of God. And it is significant that our label comes before our labor, purpose before our production, relationship before our responsibility.

Why is this important?

Because God is saying, “I’m not determining whether you’re an image bearer based upon what you accomplish.” The reason we value the unborn and the disabled is that they are still image bearers of God, regardless of what they do. What they have done or can do is not the basis of their value. We get our label before we get our labor. The order there is so very important, and to grasp this is life-changing.

Bryan Chapell — *“When you truly grasp the profound grace of being valued by God before you have done work for God—for who you are, not for what you have accomplished—then your life will never be the same. You begin to live in the freedom and power of knowing that God is for you not because of what you provide for Him, but because of what He provides for you. God’s love and mercy are never based upon what you do but on His grace towards you.”*

That’s important because it means you have value before you’re ever given a job assignment. Whether you are the CEO of a large corporation or the custodian at a local school, your worth before God never changes.

Sin frustrates work

If God designed work as a good thing, why is it often difficult and disappointing? Why does it seem to be so unproductive at times? The fact that God placed Adam in the garden to work it and to keep it shows that labor and responsibility is not a result of the fall. Rather, the fall of man into sin now means that our work is frustrated. God told Adam as much:

Genesis 3:17-19—“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

After sin entered the picture, weeds started to grow and the things we work for are reduced to ash. Man himself returns to dust. And so keep this in mind when you’re surrounded by those who gossip about you at work. Those who try to cut corners in their work, who climb over others and lie to get a promotion or whatever. Sin frustrates work. We get tired and fatigued, discouraged and

burned out. Before the fall, work was worship—creative, fruitful, and joyful. After the fall, work remains good, but it becomes soaked with futility, frustration, and frailty. Here's how:

- Work became marred by futility (Gen. 3:17-18)

God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you...instead of wheat and fruit it will bring forth thorns and thistles.” Before sin, the earth cooperated with Adam's effort. After the fall, the very ground resists us. We now labor in a fallen world that pushes back. That's why goals fall apart, plans don't pan out, systems malfunction, and effort does not always equal outcome. Sin introduces friction into every occupation—field, factory, office, or home.

- Work became marked by fatigue (Gen. 3:19a)

God said to Adam, “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat your bread.” It means work went from effortless stewardship to toilsome striving. Productivity became an exhausting thing. Which is why work leaves us physically drained and emotionally spent. It often feels like pushing a boulder uphill. Adam's sin didn't make work an evil thing, but it did make it burdensome, tiring, and taxing.

- Work became met by frailty (Gen. 3:19b)

God said, “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Death enters the scene, and with it our projects outlive us. Knowledge is lost from generation to generation. Empires crumble. Legacies fade. Human labor is always under the shadow of mortality. No matter how we try to ignore this, we're limited and temporary. In a world where everything eventually dies or decays, all work without God feels like a sandcastle against the tide. This is why King Solomon in

Ecclesiastes says, “Vanity of vanities...all is vanity.” It would be a pessimistic outlook without knowing that:

Christ redeems work

Remember that Paul’s message to the Colossians here in this third chapter is that the cross makes all the difference in our lives, and that includes the way we go about our job. Just as He brings purpose to our lives, to our marriages, and to our homes, He also fills our work with purpose when we see it through the lens of His redemptive work. Christ redeems work by addressing all three of the ways Adam’s sin frustrated it—futility, fatigue, and finality—and reversing them through His death and resurrection. Salvation transforms not only our lives but also our vocations, labor, and daily tasks.

Jesus redeems work from futility by restoring its purpose. That’s what Paul says in verses 23-24, “Work heartily, as for the Lord, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance.” Because of Adam’s fall, work often feels pointless. But because of Christ’s work, our work becomes purposeful again. In Him, it becomes worship and service to the King. And though He hasn’t removed the thorns and thistles yet, He infuses meaning into everything we do.

And then consider how Jesus redeems work from fatigue by supplying us with His strength. The Bible says in:

Ephesians 6:10—“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

Matthew 11:28—“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

The fall made work exhausting, but Christ supplies Holy Spirit empowerment who gives strength for the weary, joy in the midst of toil, endurance under pressure and rest for the soul even while the hands are busy.

And ultimately, Jesus redeems work from frailty by making it have eternal impact. That's why Paul could say in that great 'resurrection' text:

1 Corinthians 15:58—“Your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

Before Christ, work ended with death. But through Christ, we lay up treasure in heaven. And because of the resurrection, what we do 'in the Lord' lasts forever. It means that kingdom work has eternal consequences. Faithfulness in the small things is rewarded. And death no longer erases our labor. That's because Christ redeems the worker, not just the work!

2 Corinthians 5:17—“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

Work is only redeemed because the worker is redeemed. Your identity is no longer in productivity, but in union with Christ. So that my label comes before my labor! And one day, Jesus will usher in a new heavens and a new earth in which there will be no more futility, fatigue, and frailty!

Revelation 22:3—“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will worship Him.”

In the new heavens and new earth, our labor will finally be what it was in Eden—pure joy in the presence of God. And until then, it gives us the opportunity to point others to the hope of our Savior, and who see firsthand how our lives have been changed.

Titus 2:9-10—“Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering,

but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

In other words, we ‘adorn’ the doctrine of our Savior through the way we do our job. Which is to say that we give others a good picture of who God is and what He has done in our lives. It is a way in which we let our light so shine before others, and as they see our good works, they give glory to our Father in heaven. Notice a second thing:

2—The ABILITIES by which we work (3:23a)

“Whatever you do...”

We all have an assignment that we’ve been entrusted with, and we each have abilities. Sometimes, we think highly of other people’s skills, gifts, or abilities but assume that ours are inferior. But listen to Paul’s words in verse 23—“whatever you do.” The idea here is that each of us have something by which we are to contribute. Peter says it this way:

1 Peter 4:10—“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

Most Christian people spend their lives in the marketplaces of the world, hoping that they as they do, that there is some connection between what they do and the work of God in the world. We want to know that we’re making a difference in what matters. So we ask, “Does God have a purpose for what I do?” The Bible tells us the answer to that question is a resounding ‘yes!’ Paul wants believers to know that in ‘whatever they do,’ there is an opportunity to bring glory to God and advance His mission in the world.

Bryan Chapell — *“Sorrowfully, most of the time the church teaches the opposite...that our vocations are incidental, on the sidelines of what God really cares about. We assume that the spiritual priorities concentrated in preaching, witnessing, missionary endeavors, and worship activities are God’s main concern. So everything else is secondary or meant to serve these ‘really godly’ purposes.”*

But the fact of the matter is that we’re called by God to serve Him not just here in worship on Sunday, but in the workplace on Monday. The Lord calls Christian teachers, mechanics, politicians, and executives. Christian cops, lawyers, nurses, and doctors. Christians who work in the food service industry, Christian carpenters and builders, farmers and truck drivers and so on. We tend to think that there is a division between the secular and sacred when in reality no such distinction exists. Secular work is full-time ministry. Whether you are among those who work in a factory, for a company or store, or in the classroom, you are on the frontlines of Kingdom work, called to serve and represent the King of Kings.

Larry Peabody — *“In the New Testament, God does not depict the Christian life as divided into sacred and secular parts. Rather, He shows it as a unified life, one of whole-ness, in which we may single-mindedly serve Him even in our everyday work.”*

We single-mindedly serve Him even in our everyday work. That is what Paul is describing in these verses. We do it with a sense of calling upon our lives. Don’t think that only applies to pastors or missionaries or those engaged in full-time church work. Paul says in:

1 Corinthians 7:17—“Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.”

Henry Blackaby — *“The call of God is primarily to a relationship with with Him. Where God assigns you, of course, is up to Him and is sacred. Wherever God has called you, you are His missionary and are already in full-time ministry. Churches ought to commission and pray for schoolteachers, doctors, nurses, and businesspeople as they enter the mission fields where they work, just as they do for those who travel overseas in God’s service.”*

It is said that when William Carey was once asked what his business was, he replied, “My business is serving the Lord, and I make shoes to pay expenses.” Isn’t that a wonderful response? What do you do? I serve the Lord by working for such-and-such company. I serve the Lord by driving a truck. I serve the Lord by waiting tables. Friends, that is how Christians ought to view their vocation. Doing what we do for the glory of God brings a sense of dignity to our work, no matter what it involves. There is no task so small that it can’t be done for the infinite God. And this gives us an eternal perspective on our work. Jesus said:

Mark 9:41—“For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name... will by no means lose his reward.”

No matter how difficult or seemingly mundane the task may be, when we are working to fulfill whatever responsibilities God has given us, it helps us avoid the thinking that says it isn’t important. I heard the story of lady who was a famous musician but was occupied as full time mother of twins. As she was changing a stinky diaper, she lamented to a friend, “These hands have played Mozart!” And her friend replied, “Maybe those hands are diapering the next Mozart.” What

those hands were doing involved nurturing another soul, no doubt the most meaningful thing a person can do. Notice a third thing:

3—The ATTITUDE with which we work (3:23b-24)

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

We all have an assignment, we all have certain abilities, and then notice the importance of what Paul has to say about our attitude. As those who’ve been forgiven and made new in Christ, Christian men and women ought to have the very best work ethic.

Our manner

In whatever we do, we are to ‘work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.’ The Christian employee is not to be a man-pleaser. He or she doesn’t take shortcuts or cheat the boss. Whether the task is menial or monumental, its to be done in a manner that is wholehearted and not halfhearted. The eighth commandment applies to the way we work—“You shall not steal.”

Kind of like a fellow I heard about who was working on the highway. He’d been working there for a week, and he went to the job foreman and complained to him that he’d been there all week, and no one had given him a shovel. And the foreman said to him, “Well, what’s wrong with you?” He said, “You’re getting paid, aren’t you?” He said, “Oh yes, I’m getting paid. But that’s not the problem.” He said, “These other guys over here, they got something to lean on and I don’t!”

So the question to consider is are we working when we ought to be, or are we doing something else? According to research by the American Management

Association, on average, workers lose about 2 to 3 hours per 8-hour workday due to time-wasting activities, costing companies billions annually in lost productivity. Some sources note the average employee is only productive for about 2 hours and 53 minutes daily, meaning over 5 hours are lost. And the biggest time wasting activities range from things like:

- Personal internet surfing (social media, email, etc.)
- Socializing with coworkers
- Conducting personal business or errands
- Spacing out or daydreaming

When I go to Lowes or Wal-Mart, I always try to check out in a lane that has an actual person working. I'm not a fan of the self-checkout lane. I'd much rather be able to smile at someone, ask someone how their day is going, or have an interaction with a real person and not 'AI.' And yet due to costs and the impact of employees who take advantage of their situation, companies are turning more and more to technology as a means of productivity and efficiency. Technology is a great tool, but as a society we need to think through all the ethical implications of it, especially as AI puts more people out of work. I guess laziness is the father of all invention! But my point is that when people truly understand that what they do matters, it will make a huge difference in the manner in which they go about their job. And no-one has a greater incentive to work with their very best effort than a Christian has. Notice what Paul has to say about:

The motivation

Notice the last sentence in verse 24, "You are serving the Lord Christ." The Christian has a different motivation from the people around him. Whether he's

sweeping a floor, or running a machine, whether he is preparing sermons, flying a plane, selling parts for the automotive industry, teaching a group of students, the Christian has to keep this in mind: “We are serving the Lord. We are working for the Lord.” And whenever you find a Christian who does not give their best to their work, I can guarantee you it’s a Christian who’s forgotten who he’s working for. Whenever there’s a person whose heart is stirred by the privilege of working for Christ, it makes a difference in the way they sweep up. It makes a difference in the way they stock shelves. It will make a big difference in the way they spend their time.

So who are you working for, Christian? Of course, you are working for your boss or your company. Ultimately, you are working for the Lord Jesus. We serve the Lord Christ, and that revolutionizes the way you go to work—or it ought to—and the manner in which you do it. There is a final thing that I will mention and it involves:

4—The ACCOUNTABILITY for which we work (3:25-4:1)

“For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bond-servants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”

Our assignment, abilities, attitude, and then Paul’s final words on the matter emphasize accountability in our work. Whether we work for someone else or employ someone else, all of us are accountable. All of life is a stewardship, and stewardship means accountability. Paul wants these masters to recognize that they too have a Master to whom they are accountable. No person, however high they may be on the organizational chart, is without accountability. Therefore, the boss must not take advantage of those who work under him or her. Jesus said:

Matthew 7:12—“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Call it the ‘Golden Rule’ of the marketplace. Those who take advantage of others, who mistreat others, they will ultimately give an account for what they do to the Master. And it means that I will give an account to the Lord Jesus for the way I go about my work. Even those who cannot work for whatever reason, they still are accountable for the things with which they’ve been entrusted. Those who have means ought to help those less fortunate. You say, “That’s what the government is for!” Friends, government wasn’t meant to be the means of providing for a nation’s citizens. The Bible says that we’re to work for a living. Government subsidies are intended to help for a temporary period of time. Welfare is meant to be an on-ramp, not a parking lot.

2 Thessalonians 3:10—“If anyone is not willing to work let him not eat.”

The key to loving what you do is knowing who you do it for. No matter the job, whenever you do it as unto the Lord, it infuses your work with a sense of purpose. It is more than simply a means to a paycheck, more than just a daily grind, and more than an occupation—it is a vocation.

“Vocation” —*from a Latin word which means calling*

The goal is for our occupation to become a vocation, something we do out of a sense of divine call. Everybody needs something to do and a reason to do it for. Years ago, Anita and I used to work on staff at a Christian summer camp. Our staff always had to be ready for an unannounced visit from the county health inspector. When his pickup pulled through the gate, the word went out to all the staff, “Jesus is coming!” It was the code word. And so we made sure that things were spic and span. But that really is the way we ought to approach all of life,

isn't it? Jesus is coming, so we had better give this day our very best. Jesus is coming, so I want to work with a sense of grateful enthusiasm and excellence. There is no menial task, only the one we've been given. So let's do it for the sake of His glory. Paul's words in this text present us with a searching question: Who are you really working for? Behind every task, every responsibility, every assignment—whether celebrated or unnoticed—there stands One Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men.” That means your work is not just about a paycheck—it is about Him. He sees, He knows, and one day He will reward.

I'm going to give you some homework this week. Here's what I want you to do. Spend some time thinking through your occupation, and look at it through the lens of vocation. Occupation is what you do, vocation is why you do it. How is your job a platform from which you can faithfully live out the calling that God has placed on your life in Christ? If it might help, send me an email this week so I can pray for you—brandon@whatasavior.com.

If you know Jesus, but you've grown weary, resentful, or careless in your labor—come and surrender your work back to Him. Ask Him to purify your motives, strengthen your hands, and to turn your work into worship. Invite Him to restore joy where frustration has settled, and faithfulness where apathy has crept in.

If you do not know Christ as Lord, today He invites you to enter into His service. The reality is that you've been living for many masters—approval, achievement, success, self—but none of them can save, none can satisfy, and none can give any eternal reward. Only Jesus can. You're not saved by working for Him, but by trusting in Him and His finished work. He died for your sins, He rose to give you new life, and He calls you to trust in Him as Savior and Lord. Before you can work for the Lord, you must first come to the Lord. Friends, whether you need a

renewed spirit in your calling or salvation for your soul, the invitation is open. So bring your heart, your burdens, your work, and your life to Jesus Christ. And may He be the Master of our Mondays as well as our Sundays!