

Happy St. Patrick's Day. Who's wearing green this morning? If you're wearing green, stand up. We also want to applaud you for taking the time to recognize the great Irish saint and missionary St.

Patrick. If you're not wearing green today, you will be susceptible, at least if you were in third grade, when I was in third grade, to a pinch this morning. But Kamel tells me that all pinching should be consensual at this point in time. So do not pinch anyone without their permission. I made it a personal challenge to bring consensual pinching into the sermon, and I did it.

So good job on me. That's a very lighthearted approach to a very somber topic we're going to be talking about today. Later in the service, we're going to watch a video from some of the board members for our mission work in India, North India Christian Mission. Brad and Jeff and Christy, you're going to be talking about the work there. I was in India several years back.

I've talked about my time visiting the leper colony and how impacting that was. What I've not talked about is we were traveling back from I'm not even sure where, and it was late at night, or it felt late at night because pollution was so bad at the time that it just felt like there was a cloud of darkness almost over everything. After about 02:00 in the afternoon, it could have been 03:00 I don't know. That's irrelevant. We pulled in to get gas, and a little boy, about ten years old, runs out to meet us, and he starts putting gas in the car.

And so we struck up a conversation with him. He was from a lower caste in India. India operates off the caste system. He was a lower caste little boy, and he belonged to the owner of the gas station. It was not his son, it was his slave.

Now, India has a no slave policy officially, but things operate differently. And this little boy belonged to the gas station owner. How he ended up there, I'm not really sure. I know that our guide was talking to him and trying to get the story. Perhaps his parents sold him to the gas station owner to provide money so that they could take care of the rest of their family.

He was perhaps the oldest one. That form of indentured servitude can often be sort of, you work off the cost of your purchase, and when you do, you're released, sort of a bond servant. But there's also slavery where you just own someone for the rest of their life. There's two types. So we talk to this young man.

We ask him, who are you? Where do you come from? Of course, his answers were vague. He was a young kid when this happened. His memories are sort of hazy.

Are you treated all right? Well, how is a slave supposed to be treated? I guess I get a place to sleep and they feed me. What more should a slave expect? And I left very troubled by that experience because it's a culture I'm unfamiliar with.

There's nothing really we could do other than offer him some information when he needs help, a number to call, a pastor in the area that he could call to get help. And you drive away praying for the little boy and hoping that his situation is not as bad as you think it could potentially be. Today we're going to be talking through some passages in Colossians where Paul addresses the issue of slavery. Slavery in that time, it's a different culture, similar to India's culture being so different from ours. And so when we talk about this, it's one of those subjects that really here in the west, where we have at least found a place to talk about issues like this from a biblical context and understand them from a new place, we can sometimes.

We can sometimes act as if this doesn't exist anymore. And so now we talk about slavery as the employer employee context, and we're going to do that today. But before we get to that context, I just want you to realize that there are people still living in the world who have very little autonomy over their own lives. And when we read Colossians, I want Paul to be a little more aggressive with this new thing that he's calling people do. And there's no question that Paul believes that in Christ we are new creations.

And he makes a point, even in Colossians, to talk about other. There's no difference. Female, male, slave, free, Jew, gentile, we're new thing. All those old labels are in the past. When we get to next week, we're going to talk about a little bit about a particular person in Colossae that gives some context for Paul's conversations about slavery.

And I don't really know what else to say at this point in time, because when you see it face to face, your high ideals sort of get untethered and you're like, I don't know what to do. And so I know that Paul was in a situation, too, where he was not a voice of power and authority in the culture. He was a voice of authority within the church. And in the church he says, here's how things should be out there. Things are different out there.

Things are different. They still are to this day. Things are different. Today we're going to look at how Paul's words to slaves and masters apply to us. And I don't want you to leave here thinking Tim is being insensitive to this issue, because I am not.

But we live in this place and so today we will talk about the things that we live in. All right? Are we clear on that? Let's pray. I was all over the map on that, but hopefully you get my heart.

Heavenly father, this morning we're going to talk about some words. Last week we talked about words that have a lot of mud and stuff attached to them. Today I feel like we're going to put mud on words that had a completely different meaning and context than what they did then, and we may be cleaning it up in a way that sanitizes it. So I just pray that you use my words and my thoughts and apply your word into our minds and our thinking and our attitudes in ways that are very particular to each person here. Speak to us.

Holy spirit, you do your work as only you can do. And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

On Wednesday nights, if you're in the Wednesday night group, we've been going through Genesis. Last week we talked about Adam's sin. Adam, you remember, ate the fruit of the tree that God told him not to, gave him everything else he could eat and said, don't eat this. And so he sinned and God then sent a curse on him. He said, here's the ramifications.

The curse is that you're going to live now under this new world that you've sort of brought into play. And one of the things is you're going to work and it's not going to be fun anymore. It's not going to be an easy, just like responsibility. It's going to be toil and you're going to sweat, you're going to work hard soil. It's going to be a job that drains you rather than a responsibility that fulfills you and completes you.

We've all had bad jobs. Adam had one. I had one. When I was 17, my dad volunteer told me that I was going to take on a job painting a barn. If you ever are, over on Seabolt Query Road, there's this barn that sits way off the road, a beautiful little farmhouse, victorian farmhouse, and a big barn over off the long driveway.

And I painted that barn one summer. Now, my dad was a kind man and so he bought me a paint sprayer used. It had a short in it. So I'm on this aluminum, I'm hoping, ladder about 30ft up in the air with a paint sprayer with a short in it. And every time I press the release nozzle, I get a jolt of electricity through my system.

And I would tell him, I said, every night I go home and dad, it's hard. I would rather just roll the paint. No, this is going to be much faster. It's much faster. It's fine, it's fine.

And I'm like, it's not, though, honestly. I mean, Lazarus was a pretty big miracle, but the fact that I'm standing here today, I think that's a little miracle, too. Everyone has had at least one bad job. If we had time, I'd ask you to share yours with one another. But in Colossa, there were people who had bad jobs.

They were slaves, and slaving is a bad job. Can we just all agree on that? But Paul gives some words to slaves and to masters that I think, after my long apology and explanation, I think will give us some context with how we should approach situations where we have less autonomy over our lives than perhaps we would like. So we're in Colossians. If you've been with us, you know where it is by now.

Go ahead and turn there. Colossians, if you're joining us just for the first time, is a letter Paul wrote to people he had never met. And they're new Christians. And so he explains a couple of them. In chapter one, he talks about Jesus and how Jesus is Lord over everything, all of creation.

Jesus is lord over that. And in chapter two, he talks about Jesus is now sufficient. You don't need other philosophies, you don't need other religions, you don't need other rules and

regulations. Jesus is sufficient. In chapter three, he says, you are new creations, you're new things.

You're not who you once were. We are new. Who does this? Jesus does. I love that first song.

So he says, because you're new creation, start living like it. Put off the old man of sin and put on this new man in Christ. Now, this new life takes on some contextual ramifications. It has ramifications in the area of the church and our fellowship with one another. It has ramifications in the area of our families.

And we talked about that last week. And so Paul says, the way things should look now are things should look compassionate, they should look kind, we should be humble, we should live out our lives with gentleness and patience. We should be giving forgiveness and we should be living in love, which binds everything altogether. And so we looked at it in the church, we looked at it in the house, and today we're going to look at it in the workplace. And here's the scripture that we've taken a long time to get to.

Colossians, chapter three, verses 22. And we're going to read over into chapter four, verse one. I'm not going to make you stand, but I am going to make you read loud with me. Can you do that? Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, and do it not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs. There is no favoritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair because you know that you also have a master in heaven.

Since Adam was cast out of the garden, we have all been working. And those work hours are a big part of our lives, aren't they? Those hours matter to God. I love what DL Moody said. He said, it is observable that God has often called men to places of dignity and honor when they have busy and honest employment of their vocation.

Saul was seeking his father's donkeys and David his father's sheep when they were called to the kingdom. The shepherds were feeding their flocks when they had their glorious revelation in Matthew. When Jesus was born, God called the four apostles from their fishing and Matthew from collecting taxes, Moses when he was keeping Jethro sheep, Gideon from the threshing floor, Elisha from the plows. God never called a lazy. Hmm, I love that quote.

Your honest and industrious work, no matter what it is, not only has dignity in God's eyes, but is the key area where God will now demonstrate this newness of life that he is creating in you and working through you. Now, again, last week we talked about these. We need to contextualize Paul's instruction. Last week we talked about it with husbands and wives and

families. And we said the instruction Paul gives last week was in the context of a family that loves Jesus and is doing their very best to follow Jesus.

An abusive home is a different matter, and Paul would give different instructions to that. But in this situation, he says, where husbands and wives love each other and love Jesus, then here's how this thing works. And, kids, when you're in a home where mom and dad love Jesus and are trying to follow Jesus, then here's how this should work. So today we're sort of looking at another contextual thing. As we talked before, we live in a different world than Paul did.

None of you are slaves. You may feel like you're chained to your desk, tied to your job, but you're not. So we can't take Paul's instructions to those who literally were in the same way, but we can read them with an eye to bring in glory to God in the places that we work. And here's what he says again. He says, slaves, obey your earthly masters and everything, and do it not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

And so I love every once in a while to just rephrase the Bible in my own words. You guys ever do that? I call it the TTV, the Tim Thompson version. So here's the Tim Thompson Version on this. Employees, do your best at what your employers pay you to do, not just when they've got their eyes on you, when you want to impress them, but do it because you want to do the right thing and you want to honor God.

Your job may include working for a boss who's a saint. I mean, the staff here at Sherwood Oaks have that privilege. You may be working for an idiot. I mean, some days the staff at Sherwood Oaks have that privilege. You may be working for a boss who's just in way over his head.

And every day, the staff at Sherwood Oaks are working with that guy. Yet Paul says, work at whatever God's put in front of you with all your heart, because ultimately, you're not working for Tim. You're working for the Lord. Do what they ask, not because you're slaves, because you're not.

You do not have an obligation to obey when they asked you to violate ethical or legal parameters. No one should be in that situation. But otherwise, do what they pay you to do. Do it when they're around and do it when they're not around. Do it because it shows reverence and brings glory to God, not just because you want to kiss up or curry favor, because Paul says your work is your witness.

We think it's our words. And I know I've worked with people who thought it was their words that was their witness, and their work didn't really matter. But if you treat your work like it doesn't matter. Your words have no influence whatsoever. Your work is your witness, for better, for worse.

And believers who do their best work. Titus says that believers who do their best at work in every way make the teaching about God our savior, attractive. A worker who does his best, who shows proper respect, who doesn't take advantage of his employer, who can be trusted, Titus says. Makes the gospel attractive, you say? Yeah, Tim, but you don't know my boss, Peter, gives us some instruction on that.

First Peter, 218 slaves. In reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. Peter recognized that there's a lot of stuff we can't control in the world. Slaves, do your best. In reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters.

Despite our freedom, there will always be people and circumstances that we have little control over.

How do we manage that? Well, Peter gives us some idea here. He says, in reverent fear of God, first of all, submit yourself to God. Realize that God has put you here, allowed you to be here for a reason. So this is the attitude we take.

I'm here because God has allowed me or wants me to be here, and I want to honor him. Because my first allegiance is to God. I need to be first in a place of reverent fear of God. And then once we're in that place, then we submit to the master. Whatever the master is, could be a person, could be a set of circumstances, whatever.

Whoever holds power, they may be good and considerate. They'd be harsh and lacking any consideration. But in either case, the scripture says, do your very best, but remember, your first allegiance is to God, and you can step down or step aside at any point where you feel like those two come into conflict. But until that happens, be the very best employee that you can be, no matter what kind of boss you have. Those are strong words, aren't they?

Especially if you have a harsh boss. Now, again, just as he didn't let husbands and dads off the hook last week, Paul doesn't let bosses off the hook this week. Read what? Verse four. One says, masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a master in heaven.

And in this verse, I believe Paul lays the foundation for what will become the western shift in our thinking about slavery. The church in Colosse had at least one slave owner. His name was Philemon. I think we've talked about this. His name was Philemon.

And the culture the church there had at least one slave. His name was Onesimus. Now, again with our little India story, I talked about the two types of slave. There was one slave where it's human property. Then there was the bond servant, the one who either he or someone else had sold him in order to receive a certain amount of money.

And when that debt was repaid, the servant would become free. We're not told what kind of slave this Onesimus was, but Paul mentions repaying a debt in his book to Philemon in your Bible, and you can read that later today. It's a short letter. You can read it and get a little context here. So Philemon may have been an indentured servant who ran away before his debt was repaid.

We don't have a lot of information about that. But Paul does something. Onesimus runs away. He comes to Rome, he meets up with Paul, and he becomes a believer. He becomes part of the family of faith.

And Paul does something that some of us may have a hard time sort of understanding. Paul sends him back to his master. He sends him back to Philemon. But in sending him back, he sort of shifts the conversation again and again. I want you to read Philemon, because it's a short book, and I encourage you to do it.

He says, I'm sending you back, but I want you to receive him in a different way. He says, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave as a brother. Now remember, in chapter three of Colossians, Paul said, in Christ, there is no Gentile, there is no Jew, there's no circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free. But Christ is all and is in all, so, christian masters, your slaves are not a cog in the wheels of your system. They are not chattel to be treated as personal possessions.

They are people, he says, to deserve to be treated decently and fairly. What does he say? Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair. When Paul asked christian masters to begin to see their slaves as actual people and humans who deserve to be treated rightly and fairly, I believe he begins to unravel this dehumanizing net that the whole world sort of exists and works in the world, at least our part of the world will eventually come to see slavery as an affront to God, which it is. But it will be Christians who take God's word seriously.

Not always the church, but individual Christians who take God's word seriously that make it possible for us to now see slavery for what it is.

Let's go back to the verse. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a master in heaven. And remember, masters, the scripture is clear. You will give an account to your master in heaven for every thought, word. Indeed.

So do right by them. Now, what does that mean if you're an employer here this morning, if you're a boss, if you manage people, what does it mean to treat people right and fair? Well, first of all, be honest and ethical. Don't put them in situations where they have to violate some sort of personal code to work for you. That is wrong.

That is not right. Communicate expectations. I tell you, there's times, even in my job, and I feel like I'm surrounded by great, great leaders, where there's just a sense of, am I doing

what I need to do? Don't put your bosses, your employers in a position where they don't know what they're doing and then fire them because they don't do it. Communicate expectations.

Support them. They're not just cogs in your machine. They're people with their own lives. Learn their name. Be kind and compassionate.

The research is that employees who work for a supportive boss are more likely to be happier, less stressed, and have higher work output. And then do what is fair. Pay them as well as you can. In fact, pay them a little bit better than you can afford to do. So if they owe you loyalty, you owe them a decent wage.

Yeah. Honor their ideas and contributions. I see this. I think a lot of you have experienced this, where you bring something to the table and someone else gets the credit for it. Don't be that guy.

Give honor where honor is due. I'm telling you, the best thing we do at this church, in my opinion, is the fifth Sunday breakfast. Can I get an amen on that? That was not my idea. That was someone else's idea.

I will take credit for one idea. I'll give you a guess. It begins with cast and ends with a roll. That was my idea. I'll take credit for that.

But all the rest of it, someone else's idea. And it's been one of the most amazing ways that we built fellowship and community here.

I'll stick around someplace. If the pay is bad, if I know I'm valued, if I know that I'm bringing something, contributing something, and people appreciate what I bring, work gets blamed on Adam. Adam's sin. Adam brought this all on us. But work was part of our calling.

Long before Adam sinned, he was to tend the garden. He was to care for this place that God put him and we still have that calling on our lives as well. It can be in places that are hard, it can be places that are easy. But we're called to take care of each other. We're called to take care of this place.

We may have a dream job, or we may have what Mike Row calls a dirty job, but no matter the circumstances, Paul is clear. Whatever we do, whatever we work at, we work at it with all our hearts as working for the Lord, because it is the Lord Christ whom we serve. We're going to share in a time of communion here in just a little bit. And I want us to go back to this concept that we've talked about now for the last two weeks. It's this idea of submitting submission.

It's one of those words that has a lot of mud and dirt attached to it. But we've talked through some of this and I hope we've got a better idea of what it looks like and how we live

it, because it's the way that ultimately we demonstrate our submission to Jesus. And submission to Jesus is sort of the point in Corinthians, Paul will talk about this idea that we make it our goal to please Jesus because he is our ultimate master. We make it our aim, and that requires a conscious decision. It requires keeping that as our primary goal.

It requires keeping this constantly in front of us, and it means keeping ourselves held to it. Okay, am I what I'm doing and what I think I'm thinking and what I'm saying? Are these things pleasing to Jesus? We can stay busy with a lot of good stuff. But if our goal is not first and foremost pleasing Jesus, then that good stuff is merely good stuff.

It's not eternal stuff. So we need to keep our eyes focused and on the right goal at least once a week. We need to be asking ourselves, hey, am I fully submitted to Jesus? In this area, it's the hardest part of being a Christian. Quite honestly, doing the stuff is pretty easy.

But doing it in submission to Jesus, that can be challenging. And again, Jesus never insists that we submit to him. He never insists on having authority over us. He never says, you will submit to me one day. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.

But until that time, Jesus says, come to me.

And we can. Or we can choose to turn the other way. We can submit to Jesus, or we can spit in his face and crucify him on a cross, and yet he will never say a word. But once we have the new life of Christ living in us, we recognize that he has absolute sovereignty and absolute authority in our lives, and our response is to submit to him. Or we say, you are worthy, o Lord, to receive glory and honor and power and strength and dominion today.

There are areas of our lives I know because I've got them too, that are not fully submitted to Jesus. They may be difficult things. They may be hard things. They may be things you're embarrassed or ashamed about. They may be people.

Relationships are not fully submitted to Jesus. And we want to resist that. And we want to say, but Lord, you don't understand. But Lord, here's the deal. But Jesus, I think if I just keep doing it, it's going to work out.

Or honestly, Jesus, I don't care what you think. Right now I want to do what I want to do.

These places of submission are things that God has brought into our lives. They're disciplining us. They're disciplining us to look more and more like him, opportunities for him and the life that he's creating in us to be fully realized. We've all got them. I don't know what yours is, but today should take the cup and the bread.

This is an opportunity to once again say, okay, Lord, I give this area and I'm trusting it to you and help me submit to you in this area. Okay. Heavenly Father, as we take the cup and as

we take the bread, we thank you for your willingness to submit to the father's plan. We stand here today because you submitted.

God, I know there are people in the world around me who are watching my relationship with you and how I live in that space of obedience and submission to you. God, I want to do that. Well, I cannot do it on my own. Thankfully, you have given me your spirit, and your spirit is in strengthening, encouraging, counseling, motivating me to live in every respect, no matter people or circumstances in submission, ultimately to you.

We thank you for the cross, Lord. Help us take up ours and follow you well in Jesus' name amen.

Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church. Did you know you can watch all of our video content, both current and past, on our YouTube channel? Visit [YouTube.com Slash Sherwood Oaks](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3) to watch messages, series and complete worship services.