

A SINGLE MESSAGE FOR SERVANTS AND MASTERS

Colossians 3:22-25; 4:1

Intro: We have had one verse devoted to wives, one to husbands, one to children, and one to fathers. Now we come to *four verses* which the Apostle Paul addressed to servants, and then one at the beginning of chapter 4 to masters. Of course when Paul wrote this epistle, he did not write it in verses and chapters. They were added later to help us locate certain subjects or phrases of Scripture in an easier manner. But even though Paul did not number verses and chapters, we can easily see by looking at chapters 3 and 4 in our English translations that Paul had about as much to say to servants as he did to wives, husbands, children, fathers, and masters combined! And what Paul said to masters was more than he said to the wives, the husbands, the children, and the fathers considered separately.

We do not see exactly the same emphasis in the parallel passages in Ephesians. There Paul had the most to say to husbands, but next in order were the servants. Then, wives. Then, children. And finally, masters.

Why was there such a strong emphasis on servants in Colossians?

When we consider what Paul wrote about Tychicus in Eph. 6:21 and Col. 4:7, and about Onesimus in Col. 4:9, it is generally accepted that Tychicus and Onesimus were with Paul when he wrote these three epistles, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, and that they left Rome for Ephesus to deliver the Ephesian letter, and then went on to Colosse where they delivered the Colossian letter and Paul's letter to Philemon about Onesimus.

Who was Onesimus? He was a runaway slave. His master was Philemon. Onesimus had probably gone to Rome so that he could get lost in the crowd, and find some way of supporting himself so that he could live as a free man. But in the providence of God the paths of Paul and Onesimus had crossed, and Paul was instrumental in leading Onesimus to Christ. And by the time that Paul wrote the Ephesian and Colossian letters enough time had gone by that Paul was thoroughly convinced that Onesimus had been saved. But Paul was also convinced that Onesimus should go back to Philemon, make things right with Philemon, and become his bondservant again. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him, but he did not feel before God that he could do that without Philemon's

permission. However, Paul did not ask Philemon to send Onesimus back to Rome where he could help Paul. Actually we don't know what happened, but from the lack of any mention of Onesimus in Paul's future letters, we must assume that he stayed with Philemon.

Now it was important that Onesimus make things right with his master, Philemon. Why? Well, there are at least a couple of reasons.

One is that Onesimus needed to learn, and all Christians need to learn, that coming to Christ means that we need to correct any wrongs that there may be in our lives. Onesimus' salvation did not mean that he could forget his master, Philemon. In fact, if Onesimus had truly been saved, he would have wanted to make things right with Philemon, whether or not Philemon had been a believer.

Lucille and I attended an evening service at Grace Community Church a few years ago with Will and Katie, and they had a baptismal service before Dr. MacArthur spoke. All three of the people who were baptized that night were Hispanics. They gave their testimony in Spanish, and it interpreted by the man who baptized them. One of those who was baptized, a man, said in his testimony that he was illegally in the United States. But he went to say that he knew that as a Christian he had to get that straightened out, and so he planned to leave that week to return to Mexico so he could apply for legal residence. I don't know if anyone had mentioned this to him. He talked like it was something that he knew in his heart that he had to do.

That is what Onesimus faced. As a Christian he needed to go back to Colosse to Philemon, ask his forgiveness, and ask that he might be Philemon's servant again. He wasn't asking for his freedom. He was asking for forgiveness. And so Paul wrote a letter for Onesimus to Philemon, telling him what had happened, asking Philemon to take Onesimus back. Paul even offered to pay Philemon for anything that Onesimus may have taken from him.

Now I think that we can assume that Philemon took Onesimus back, but the Bible doesn't say that. And I believe that it doesn't tell us what happened because that is not the main point. Onesimus did what he should have done regardless of what Philemon's reaction was.

There are many things that cannot be undone when a person comes to

Christ, but he needs to do what he can do to make right what is wrong.

But there is another point about the story of Onesimus, a bondservant, which is important. It contains a message for all who will read the Bible that becoming a Christian does not relieve us of the responsibility to make right wrongs that we have done before we were saved – if we can!

Today we compare the master and servant relationship in Bible times to the employer and employee relationship that we have today. There are a lot of similarities, but there is also a major difference. A bondservant *belonged* to his master. *He was his master's property!* Paul did not speak of the rightness or the wrongness of the system. He was primarily concerned that Christian bondservants and Christian masters would behave in their positions as Christians. We as Christians are far better off if we don't get involved in political movements as demonstrators or agitators. If we behave as the people of God, our influence can be far more influential than if we protest against things that we don't like. To be sure we need to vote, and then leave matters in the Lord's hands. In running away from Philemon, Onesimus was acting as a man of the world; in going back, he was acting like a child of God.

So I think that the reason that Paul had so much to say about servants in Colosse, was to explain to the church why Onesimus had come back, and to show them that he was doing the right thing.

Now let us go to our text, and we see that Paul began by addressing himself to:

I. SERVANTS (Col. 3:22-25).

When Paul used the word “servants,” the Greek word is δούλοι. The word that he used for “masters” is κυριοις. This is the same word that is used in verses 23 and 24 for “Lord.” When Paul in Rom. 1:1 (and in other place) called himself “a servant of Jesus Christ, he was using this same word for a servant, δούλος. So Paul was likening the relationship of a slave to his master to the relationship that we as Christians have to our Lord. Just as slaves were bought (and sold) in those days, so we “are not” our “own,” we are “bought with a price,” and it is our joy to “glorify God” in our bodies, and in our spirits, “which are God's” (1 Cor. 6:20).

Paul told the servants that they were to do toward their masters like

children are to act toward their parents – “obey”! That is, they were to listen to what their masters told them to do, and then do it! And this extended to “all things.”

Now there was one negative: “not with eyeservice, as menpleasers.” This is the service that you do when your master is watching you, but which you don’t do if he is not watching.

Instead it is to be “in singleness of heart, fearing God.” You can almost guess correctly what “singleness of heart” is. Lightfoot translates “singleness” as *undivided* (p. 294). Do it like it is the only thing that you have to do. And when Paul brings in the heart he means that it has to be genuine, not just pretending. But then isn’t it interesting that he brings God into what a servant does. Remember Paul is writing to Christian servants. What does it mean to fear God? It means that your main purpose in what you do is to please God, and you treat your master’s command second only to the Word of God. And just as a Christian wants to do the will of God right now, so a servant should seek to do what his master has assigned to him in the quickest and best way that he possibly can.

But then in verse 23 Paul enlarged upon verse 22. He is saying that servants are to do their work lit. “from the soul” as you would if the Lord were your only Master. Actually whatever work we do, we are to do it as though our orders had come directly from the Lord of heaven instead of a master on earth. And in reality this is what every servant of the Lord is doing. You may be serving a human boss, but if you are a child of God, in reality you are serving the Lord Christ, and there are going to be rewards awaiting you when you stand before the Lord.

There used to be a Pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis whose name was Robert G. Lee. He had a sermon which he probably preached a hundred or more times called, “Pay Day Some Day.” I think it was to warn sinners that they were going to have face the Lord some day and take the consequences of their sins. But according to this 24th verse of Col. 3, those of us who know the Lord are going to have a heavenly “Pay Day” also. Whatever you do as a doctor, a school teacher, a secretary, a bank clerk, a machinist, a housewife – whatever you do, you may be getting some of your orders from a human master, but your heavenly master is going to give His own reward for good work well done. What that will be we can’t say. But whatever it is, it will be far greater than any inheritance you can get here on earth.

You see, it is not just the pastor who is serving the Lord. We are all the Lord's servants. And the most humble job on earth, if done as unto the Lord and to please the Lord because you want to glorify and please Him, is going to be rewarded.

But the Apostle Paul concludes his words to servants with a warning. Do you remember that in verse 22 the Apostle Paul mentioned "eyeservice"? You may be able to get by with this when your dealing with a human master, but not so with the Lord. The Lord knows what you and I are doing twenty-four hours of every day. And He knows whether it is good or bad. Not only does the Lord see us all of the time, but he knows our hearts, our thoughts. He knows if what we are doing, we are doing it *from our souls*, or grudgingly and because we feel we are forced to do it. Seniority gives us no special privileges with the Lord. He is not a respecter of persons.

All of this applies to you students and your school work. So when you go off to your job tomorrow, remember the Lord! Make it your purpose to respond to the one over you like you would to the Lord. Don't you know what a profound effect this had on Onesimus when he went back to Colosse to be not only Philemon's servant, but at the same time and with the same tasks, the Lord's servant. What a difference it makes when we bring the Lord into all that we do.

Now let's see what Paul said to the masters.

II. MASTERS (Col. 4:1).

There were all kinds of masters in those days. Some were cruel, and some were kind. Some were very demanding to the point of expecting their servants to do the impossible. Some were selfish; some were generous. Some were Christians; others were not. Paul here was addressing people like Philemon, although Philemon was probably already doing what Paul wrote here.

Paul told the Christian masters that they were to be "just," or righteous, in their dealings with their servants. They were to deal with their servants just like they would deal with their family or their friends. "Just" means that which is *right*, or *righteous* in God's sight, and "equal" means *fair*. Paul meant that they were to treat their slaves not only like the Lord wanted them to be treated, but in the same way that the Lord treated the

masters. They were to provide for their servants like the Lord provided for them. They were to protect their servants as the Lord protected them. They were to be forgiving toward their servants as the Lord has forgiven them.

Concl: I gave my message this morning the title, *A Single Message for Servants and Masters*. Obviously servants and masters were at opposite ends of society. Masters usually were people of wealth; in Roman and Greek cultures the servants had no rights. Masters were on the giving end and servants were on the receiving end. The case of many servants was really deplorable. They often lacked even the bare necessities of life. But why would I say that Paul's instructions to both groups was really the same? My answer is this, and I believe that this was Paul's main emphasis in what he said to servants first, and then to the masters. His message to both groups was that they were to remember the Lord in the responsibilities that they had, to bring Him into their lives and into their work, and to seek above everything else to seek to please the Lord as the greatest priority in their lives.

There is a verse in the book of Proverbs which tell us this:

7 When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him (Prov. 16:7).

Nothing could make for better relations between a master and his slaves than for both of them to know the Lord, and then for both to seek by God's grace to do only that which was pleasing to the Lord in their relationship with each other. Isn't that true also for husbands and wives, and for parents and children? If pleasing the Lord makes our enemies to be at peace with us, then what must be the blessing in store for us if we seek to please the Lord with those with whom we have the closest ties?

Such living calls for humility. It calls for faith in the Lord. It calls for patience and love. But when we take God at His Word, and look to Him that we might obey Him, He will open the windows of heaven and pour out blessings that we have wanted, but have not been able to find when we have looked for them in our own way. May the Lord change us. That is how the blessing starts, and the only way it can continue.