

WORK MATTERS

"WHEN I GROW UP: WORK AS FORMATION"

COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1; EPHESIANS 6:5-9

This Week's Core Competency

Single-mindedness – I focus on God and his priorities for my life. Matthew 6:33, *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Today's workplace looks nothing like the workplace of a century ago. Technology, automation, education, globalism, and a number of other factors make the places we work vastly different from even just a generation earlier. Even with major workplace advancements, employers today are struggling to find employees who have a strong work ethic. A good "work ethic" includes the use of common sense, value shown for customers, esteem for employers, camaraderie among co-workers and pride in a job well done. These skills are tragically declining from our offices, warehouses and factories.

Matthew T. Hora, author of *Beyond the Skills Gap* (Harvard Education Press, 2016), recently shared some of his findings from his recent workplace research project, "In the course of traveling through Wisconsin conducting interviews with business owners and HR directors... I was struck by how often I heard about problems with employees' work ethic. Described as being 'dependable,' 'punctual,' 'hard-working,' and 'committed to the company,' it was considered the most important competency by

The greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

the seventy-two biotechnology and manufacturing employers in our study, even more important than technical knowledge and ability. As one CEO said, 'If they don't have the work ethic, I don't have anything to work with.' These findings are consistent with other research, such as a recent National Association of Colleges and Employers survey, in which 97.5% of respondents rated work ethic as an essential aspect of career readiness."

Finding people with a strong work ethic is perhaps the greatest challenge for those seeking to hire quality employees today. Hora continues: "But what exactly is work ethic? Modern scholars view it as a generalized and multidimensional psychological construct related to work-oriented values. These values include distinct factors such as hard work, self-reliance, morality, and delayed gratification, which suggests that when we talk about a person's work ethic, we're actually talking about a host of their personal traits, beliefs, and aptitudes."

"Traits, beliefs, and aptitudes" sounds very similar to our own 30 Core Competencies – Beliefs, Practices, and Virtues (see page 8). As disciples of Jesus Christ, our obedience to Him should change the way we approach work. If we believe that Jesus' approval is our ultimate reward, then we will approach work differently. Work can become more than just a place to pick up a paycheck. Work can become a place of spiritual growth and character development. A model employee is not someone who just pleases the boss or makes customers happy. A model employee is someone who does what is right when the boss is away and helps the customer even when no recognition is offered. Model employees can become model bosses who can train others in like manner.

A strong “work ethic” is an invaluable commodity in the world of business today. Even the most advanced technologies will struggle and fail to replace this essential intangible. As we examine Colossians and Ephesians in this study, we will observe some key realities that will help us work better with more satisfaction. These keys are more than efficiency techniques or success hacks. These truths are spiritual traits that will draw us closer to God and make us more valuable in the workplace. We will discover the key factors in producing a work ethic that would please even our most ultimate of authorities. Rewards and advancement are promised to those who figure out for whom they are truly working.

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

Colossians 3:22-4:1

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Ephesians 6:5-9

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle the word “heart” in both passages.
- * Box the word “Lord” in both passages.
- * Underline the phrase “earthly masters” in both passages.
- * Draw a line from “earthly masters” to another type of master in each passage.
- * Double underline “not only” in each passage.
- * Draw an arrow from “not only” to the limiting actions in each passage.
- * Draw an arrow from “serve” or “serving” to the one being served in each passage.
- * Highlight the result of good service in each passage.
- * Double underline “no favoritism” in each passage.
- * Circle the word “heaven” in each passage and draw an arrow to the word it modifies.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Who are the main characters in these two passages (Col. 3:22-4:1 and Eph. 6:5-9) and how are they related to each other?
2. How would you respond to the suggestion that these passages regarding slaves have no value for us today because of the modern world's rejection of slavery?
3. According to Colossians 3:22-23 and Ephesians 6:6-7, what should be our chief motivation as we work?
4. What would be some modern day examples of living out Colossians 3:23 and Ephesians 6:7?
5. What is ironic about the reward to be received as described in Colossians 3:24?
6. Paul introduces a new category or status in Ephesians 6:8. What does this contribute to his teaching?
7. What is favoritism and why is it a bad thing?
8. What are masters/leaders reminded of as they consider the treatment of those who serve them?
9. What would be some modern day examples of living out Colossians 4:1 and Ephesians 6:9?
10. Why would Paul not challenge Roman culture's treatment of the lower classes (women, children or slaves), but rather ask people of this lower status to live differently?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Colossians and Ephesians, two of Paul's prison epistles, were written at approximately the same time in the middle of the first century (AD 60-61) along with the books of Philippians and Philemon. Three of these books (Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians) were written to churches and one was written to a slave owner (Philemon) about his runaway slave (Onesimus). Much of the content of Ephesians and Colossians is similar. Some would say that these two letters are more alike than any other epistles found in the New Testament. It is estimated that 75 of the 155 verses found in Ephesians are closely replicated in Colossians (Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, 25).

Colossians chapters 3-4 and Ephesians chapters 4-6 are perfect examples of such similarity. Paul repeats in each of these two epistles a collection of instructions for a first-century believing household. A Roman household would typically be led by the masculine *pater familias* ("father of the family") who would work to be a responsible husband, father and also a master of household slaves. Following Roman culture, "household instructions" would be anticipated to place heavy emphasis upon the man with high expectations that he should establish and maintain household dominion (Douglas Moo, *Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 293). Instead, Paul addresses the lesser in each household relationship first (women, children and slaves) with much more instruction and exhortation than what is given to the household leader in each case. This surprising twist of emphasis mirrors the way in which life is to be lived differently after becoming a follower of Christ (Colossians 3:17 and Ephesians 5:8). Even when homesteading, those changed by Christ domicile differently. Wives and husbands are to submit to each other. Children and fathers are to honor and respect each other. Even slaves, who had the lowest of first-century social status, are instructed to approach their labors differently after coming to Christ. Masters are also to go against the grain of culture by showing respect toward those who served them. When Christ changes us, He changes the way we treat those whom we love, as well as those with whom we work. This changed way of living and working is just as counter-cultural now as it was then.

The book of Philemon reads like an extended illustration of these Colossian/Ephesian household instructions for slaves and masters. Believers, whether slaves or masters, were expected to treat each other better than the way most of the culture treated members of their own households (Philemon 1:12-21). While categories of status within a society may have not changed immediately due to Christian faith, exchanges between those of a common household could not remain the same. Faith in Christ challenged individuals of all categories of status to behave and work differently. These small changes of behavior in the household would soon spill out into the street, the public square and eventually into fabric of the broader culture.

Slavery in the Roman Empire was different in many ways from later historical experiences of slavery. The density and diversity of the slave population was surprising in the Roman Empire. In large cities like Rome, one third of the population were estimated to be slaves and another third were freed slaves. These two groups were both working to support the other third of Roman citizens who owned or previously freed them. People often entered themselves or their children into slavery to pay off debts. Many slaves purchased their own freedom with time served and/or payments made to masters. Slavery was by no means pleasant in Roman culture. What was perhaps most difficult to handle as a slave was the lack of rights and freedoms. "The essential negative consequence of belonging to the slave class was that slaves had no legal right to the basic human freedoms granted to every Roman citizen, freeborn and freed. As a result, slaves were more easily exploited and abused" (Robert Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, 181).

Modern readers might be tempted to gloss over these household instructions for slaves and masters, thinking that such biblical texts have little or no value today since slavery is no longer a major problem in our time. There are a number of reasons why these instructions are still meaningful today. Paul's household instructions found in Colossians and Ephesians focus more on the Christian and his or her Christ-like activity and less on how Christian or un-Christian societal structures happened to be. More

instruction is given to slaves here than to other members of the household (wives, husbands and children) showing that God can be faithfully served even when of low status. There is a sharp contrast made between “earthly” or “human” masters (Colossians 3:22) and “heavenly” masters (Colossians 4:1). We should do our best serving earthly masters while striving to please our ultimate Heavenly Master. We are all “servants” or “slaves” of Christ (Ephesians 6:6). This slavery of the Divine Redeemer will never cease. These truths are timeless and valuable even if slavery is culturally abolished in our time. We all work (Colossians 3:23) and in some way provide (Colossians 4:1) for those whom we lead. How we approach work and leadership is timeless. We can grow in our faith if we seek to serve Christ while we are working for “earthly masters.” Paul’s household directions regarding slaves are not an argument promoting slavery. Rather Paul’s slave directions can be seen as a model for work motivation, arguing from the lesser to the greater. If the lowest of the low (a slave) can find dignity and purpose in his or her work and be motivated to serve Christ because of His care and reward, how much more should those who are not suffering the indignities of slavery serve God through their work? Christianity has always grown its deepest roots in the fertile soil of the lowly and humble.

The irony of this lesser to greater argumentation reaches its climax in Colossians 3:24. Slaves, who can earn no wages and have no hope of any legacy or inheritance, are promised they will “receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” This colorful phrase uses language that emphasizes a re-payment or a recompense for labors provided. Slaves do not normally receive pay or remuneration for their work. Yet here they are encouraged to work hard for a watching Christ who will reward or repay them. And if the image of payment of slaves were not ironic enough, add to it the concept of an inheritance. Slaves had no rights to own Roman property and would have never dreamed about someone giving them something they could never earn in a thousand lifetimes. These same under-privileged slaves are promised an inheritance from their heavenly Master, Jesus Christ, something no earthly master would provide. We are all slaves of Christ. We work for Him. Our “earthly” authorities pale in comparison.

Paul ends his household discussion with a word about “favoritism.” In the conclusion of both the Ephesian and Colossian household instruction, God is described as a judge. In Colossians this judgment is focused on those (slaves) who do not serve Christ well (Colossians 3:25). In Ephesians 6:9, the judgment is focused on threatening masters who mistreat their servants. The word “favoritism” literally means “to take or receive someone based upon the pleasantness of his or her face.” God does not provide special treatment or relinquish His judgment based upon who we are, what status we have, or how beautiful we may appear. If God is impartial like this, then we should not hold people in higher or lower regard based upon their status or privilege. In the church, people of low status are “brothers” and “sisters” with people of high status. Those with wealth or acclaim are fellow “servants” with those who are low. God’s impartiality teaches us to embrace all with whom we live and work. Paul reminds individuals they will receive judgement for evil that is done. Regardless of how difficult or ruthless a master may be, each is responsible for his own behavior. Bad bosses/masters will be judged as well. Rather than seeking to abolish a suspect cultural institution like slavery, Paul challenges the participants in such a system to thrive in it righteously. The best way to ultimately destroy darkness is with agents of light.

Jobs, positions, and conventions may shine or fade, but our service to Christ, while serving others, will never go out of style. Knowing for whom you work is more important than knowing for what you work. Work all your work, hard for Christ! His reward is greater than anything you could ever earn on your own.

The Message of the Passage(s)

Work soulfully and with sincerity, not just for human authorities, but for the Lord Christ who will reward you beyond what you deserve.

day 4 EMBRACE – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the three "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following living questions:**

- How is God making himself known to you?
- How does God want to change you?
- How is God calling you to change your world?

notes N STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v.22 **Slaves** “... the injunctions to slaves are more extended than those to masters, and are accompanied by special encouragement. This, it has been suggested, is a reflection of the social structure of these churches (the implication being that they contained more slaves than masters)” (F.F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 169).

v.22 **earthly** “translates a phrase using that notoriously slippery Greek word: *kata sarx*, which could be rendered simply ‘according to the flesh’ ... Here the word is being used in its neutral sense: the slaves’ masters belong to the human realm, But, as is often the case. even when Paul uses *sarx* neutrally, there is an implicit contrast intended: the slave has a master on earth, but he or she also has a ‘master’ in heaven” (Moo, 309).

v.22 **eye** “Denotes service performed only under the master's eye (*ophthalmos*, ‘an eye,’ *doulos*, ‘a slave’), diligently performed when he is looking, but neglected in his absence” (W. Vine, “Eye-Service” *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

v.22 **sincerity** “Has the sense of ‘singleness.’ Its meaning is illustrated by the use of a cognate word in Matthew 6:22, brought out very well in the traditional rendering of the KJV: ‘The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.’ The ‘single’ eye has a concentrated focus that leads a person consistently in the same direction” (Moo, 310).

v.23 **heart** literally “psyche or out of the soul.” “... the vital heart of the person, with all the individual's life force behind it. The exhortation, therefore, probably echoes the elaboration of the *Shema* in Deut. 6:5 as reiterated by Jesus (Mark 12:30): ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...’” (James Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and Philemon*, 255).

v.24 **serving** “serve the Lord as a slave serves” “From the root ‘to bind’ meaning we are bond-servants or slaves to Christ, in contrast to a hired servant” (Charles Hodge, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 361).

v.24 **inheritance/reward** “A slave had no legal right to an inheritance on earth even if one should be left to him. Normally he was not given wages. (Sometimes a kind master would set aside wages in order to accumulate a fund by which the slave could purchase his freedom.) His position was entirely different from that of the son and heir. But the Christian slave could look forward to being treated on the same basis as the free man, when he stood before the Lord” (Everett Harrison, *Colossians*, 100-101).

v.8 **free** Could mean 1) born free, never a slave or 2) it could mean a freed slave, one who had been emancipated. Whether a bond-servant or free, all will be judged righteously by a holy God. The concept of a freeman/freewoman was a hope for all slaves. This status marked the beginnings of the end of the institution of cultural slavery. Freeman status in Roman culture was highly sought after. Many Romans marked their graves with notices of becoming a freeman or freewoman (for more see Sandra Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*, 42).

v.24 **favoritism** “Reflects the Hebrew idiom ‘raise/receive the face’ of someone prostrating himself, that is, accept and welcome him. But it was long established in an unfavorable sense, referring to unwarranted acceptance. that is, ‘favoritism’— a temptation particularly for judges (Lev. 19:15: Deut. 1:17: 16:19)” (Dunn, 258).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

A missionary in Kenya was traveling around visiting churches in several villages. In one particular village, he heard many stories of how the Lord saved and changed lives. He came across four young men in a large hole, covered in mud. He asked a simple question, "What are you doing?" With the biggest smiles on their faces, the response was powerful, "We are working for the Lord." After a short conversation he discovered that the mud walls of their church were deteriorating due to termite damage, and they were making bricks to build all new walls. These four men may not have had much to give but what they did have, their ability, they gave completely to the Lord. They worked tirelessly to make thousands of bricks to build a place where their community could join together in worship. Is making bricks working for the Lord? Absolutely? Is selling insurance or used cars working for the Lord? Yes! Is doing laundry and wiping up spills working for the Lord? You bet! Serving the Lord may look different for each of us but our goal is the same. Is what I do bringing honor and glory to Him? Am I serving Him in all I do? There is no sacred or secular work. As believers, everything we do is unto the Lord. I pray you are encouraged by that this week as you honor Him in your work!!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Colossians 3:22-25

1. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your _____, as working for the _____ not for _____." (v. 23)

2. According to verse 22, how are you to work?

What Do You Think

In our busy lives, we have gotten good at doing several things at one time. What do you think single-minded means? How can you pay attention to things God thinks are important in your life?

What R U Going To Do

Family Challenge: Before every activity this week, remind each other that you are working (doing whatever you do) for the Lord. Give each person a point when they remember to say it. At the end of the week, the winner gets a treat!

Core Comp

Single-Mindedness – I pay attention to what God thinks is important for my life.

Memory Verse

Matthew 5:16 – In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.