

PROPER SERVICE STEMMING FROM PROPER MOTIVATION:

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

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OUTLINE

THESIS: As a Christian variation on the traditional Jewish-Stoic *Haustafel*, Colossians 3:22-4:1 is unique in its repeated calls to slaves and masters for actions that stem from proper motivations of the heart, which in turn are based upon a right understanding of the Lordship of Christ.

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As a Christian variation on the traditional Jewish-Stoic *Haustafel*, Colossians 3:22-4:1 is unique in its repeated calls to slaves and masters for actions that stem from proper motivations of the heart, which in turn are based upon a right understanding of the Lordship of Christ. All calls for obedience and fair treatment are continually grounded in the fact that both slaves and their “lords” have one “Lord” to whom they are accountable both for their actions and the motivations that spur them.

This passage, as part of the code of Col 3:18-4:1, is quite possibly the earliest example of Christian instruction to the three household relationships of husband and wife, parents and children, and masters and slaves.¹ At the same time, the basic “household code,” known as the *Haustafel*, is not original to Christianity, for Classical Greek philosophers and Jewish ethicists also offered instruction for the proper organization of the household.² But Christian leaders, such as Paul, adapted the *Haustafel* by adding the uniquely Christian focus on heart motivations behind the service, the superior members’ responsibilities to and concern for the subordinate members, and the call for all service to be done “as to the Lord,” in light of the work of Christ.³

Within the Colossians *Haustafel* are several features that reveal purposes for its inclusion. Some scholars see the *Haustafel* as a possible counter to the “otherworldly” philosophy in chapter two by “[recalling] them to the simple duties of family life and correct social behavior.”⁴ The

¹ Most commentators place Ephesians as a later composition, and while there is some debate over whether 1 Peter predates Colossians, most view the Colossians household code as its “first existent appearance in early Christian literature” (Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Household Code and Wisdom Mode of Colossians,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 74 [1999]: 93).

² James C. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 244.

³ C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, The Cambridge Greek New Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1962), 127; Col 3:23; Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon, Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 218-219.

⁴ Roy Yates, “The Christian Way of Life: The Paraenetic Material in Colossians 3:1-4:6,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 63 (Fall 1991): 250.

section dealing with slaves is longer than any other part of the *Haustafel*, which can possibly be attributed to the situation presented in its accompanying epistle, Philemon, of Onesimus, the runaway slave (Col 4:9, 12; Phlm 12, 17, 23). The proper behavior of slaves was at the forefront of Paul's mind, and it had made him "doubly anxious to emphasize the duties of the slave toward the master, lest in his love for the offender he should seem to condone the offence."⁵ The Colossian church was probably also comprised more of slaves than of slaveholders,⁶ and as such, Paul would have more to say to slaves than to their masters.

Several general observations can be made concerning unique literary devices of the Colossian *Haustafel*. Interestingly, it is included in the epistle in such a way that the entire passage could be easily removed from its context without syntactical confusion.⁷ It has simple lines that aid memorization, and it contains an unusual number of *hapax legomena*. All of these further support the theory that it is a pre-existing Christian catechesis adapted by Paul.⁸ Also, whereas Χριστός is the overwhelming designation for Jesus in the rest of Colossians, κύριος is used almost exclusively in the *Haustafel* to refer to Jesus. While this could be from the original form of the *Haustafel*, Paul uses κύριος here as a play on words between "lords" (κύριοι = "masters") and *the* Lord (κύριος), Christ. At any rate, this section is the practical outworking of the theology given earlier, and continues the call to do all things "in the Lord" (3:17). What is perhaps most noteworthy is the careful, repetitive structure of each exhortation, in which there is an imperatival call to action, a "fleshing out" of that action in examples that reveal correct manners or motivations, and a causal statement grounding this action in the Lordship of Christ.

⁵ J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1879), 229.

⁶ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), 162.

⁷ Lincoln, "The Household Code and Wisdom Mode of Colossians," 94; Yates, "The Christian Way of Life," 248.

⁸ Yates, "The Christian Way of Life," 248.

Following instructions to wives, husbands, children and fathers, Paul exhorts slaves to obey their earthly masters “in all things”: Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε κατὰ πάντα τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις. Paul then addresses the manner by which this imperative is to be carried out, first with a negative example: μὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι. Both nouns occur only here in the New Testament and in the parallel verse, Eph 6:6. Ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ does not occur anywhere else in Greek literature, leading most scholars to assume that Paul aptly coined it for this purpose.⁹ Literally meaning “eye-service,”¹⁰ Moule fleshes this out as “going through the outward movements of the work *without a corresponding keenness of will behind them.*”¹¹ On the other hand, ἀνθρωπάρεσκος is found not infrequently in the LXX and means “men-pleaser”, which in the LXX took on a meaning similar to a “hypocrite.”¹² Though these words are nearly *hapax legomena*, their meaning is clear: slaves are not to do their work grudgingly or superficially in order to pacify their masters.

Paul now offers a positive example of the kind of obedience he is calling for: ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀπλότητι καρδίας. Ἀπλότης occurs eight times in the New Testament and is defined by BDAG 883 as “simplicity, sincerity, uprightness and frankness,” here as “sincerity of heart,” defying the hypocritical connotations of the two previously discussed words.

Motivation for such all-encompassing obedience is based upon their reverence for Christ: because they “fear the Lord” (φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον). There is a textual variant here: whereas

⁹ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 160; Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 130; Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 228.

¹⁰ BDAG 5454 defines it as “service that is performed only to make an impression in the owner’s presence.”

¹¹ Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 130.

¹² Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 160; Marcus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 447; Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 228; Ps 52:6; PsSol 4:7, 8, 19; Eph 6:6; 2 Clem 13:1; 1 Chron 29:17, Wisd 1:1.

some witnesses read κύριον, others, including the weighty P⁴⁶, read θεόν. The reason for this variation is probably because the “fear of Christ” does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament, whereas the “fear of God” does.¹³ But κύριον continues the word-play of this passage, and those witnesses who substitute θεόν lose this parallel. This verse alone hammers home the tremendous importance of heart motivation over outward service, as slaves are to do “all things” for their earthly masters, not for their eyes or approval alone but as actions overflowing from the sincere hearts of those who fear the Lord.

Colossians 3:23 reiterates and builds upon the emphasis in verse 22 on heart-motivation and service done to the Lord. Work (ἐργάζεσθε, which Harris notes is a stylistic variant of the imperative ποιῆτε)¹⁴ is to be done “from the soul” (ἐκ ψυχῆς), mirroring the ἀπλότητι καρδίας of verse 22.¹⁵ The NIV translates ἐκ ψυχῆς as “with all your heart” (cf. Eph 6:7: “wholeheartedly”). It is action done “with all the individual’s life force behind it.”¹⁶ “As to the Lord” (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ) not only builds upon the description of obedience to human masters in 3:22, but it replaces them with the Lord as the primary object of the slave’s service. “To the Lord” is contrasted with “to men” (οὐκ ἀνθρώποις), here reversing the “negative-positive” example order of the previous verse. The reference to men (ἀνθρώποις) is also a parallel to the ἀνθρωπάρεσκος of 22c. Slaves are to wholeheartedly work for *the* Lord by obeying their “lords,” the former being motivation for service to the latter.

¹³ T.K. Abbott, *International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 294; N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 149; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 160; Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 228; Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 42.

¹⁴ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon: An Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 184.

¹⁵ Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 447, call them “synonymous”.

¹⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 255.

To make more attractive the difficult task of not only obeying their masters “in all things” but doing so “from the soul,” Paul offers a proverbial “carrot on a stick” in verse 24. They are already aware of this (εἰδότες),¹⁷ but Paul reminds them again that the Lord will reward such services with “the reward of the inheritance” (τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας). Τῆς κληρονομίας is probably a genitive of apposition and defines the content of this reward.¹⁸ Κληρονομία in the LXX most frequently refers to the physical inheritance of the land of Canaan, but in the Pauline Epistles it has taken on the spiritual connotation of eternal salvation as fully received after faithful service in this life. Within this phrase lies a great paradox, such as is found only in the new order of life in Christ. In first century Greco-Roman culture, slaves were unable to legally receive or pass on an inheritance,¹⁹ yet here slaves are equal recipients with their masters of this inheritance of eternal life. For these slaves, this would have been motivation indeed!

Building yet again on the statement in 23a that the Lord is to be the primary focus of the slave’s service, Paul offers a final command, along with a warning. The verb δουλεύετε has generated much discussion among scholars, for this form can be either indicative or imperative. J.B. Lightfoot is the chief proponent for the indicative, followed by Dunn, Dibelius-Greeven, Conzelmann, and most English translations. He reasons that the indicative explains who the κυρίος of the previous verses is—Christ. Also, the parallel passage of Eph 6, which Lightfoot assumes is the correct text, follows the imperatival participle δουλεύοντες with ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ, and he expects the same here.²⁰ An indicative reading, “It is the Lord Christ you serve,” would emphasize again who is the slave’s primary κυρίος —Jesus Christ—and provide further

¹⁷ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 185: “In Paul’s letters, εἰδότες ὅτι often introduces a well-known fact that forms the bases (causal εἰδότες) of an exhortation or affirmation.”

¹⁸ As all scholars consulted agree.

¹⁹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 257.

²⁰ Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 229.

motivation for the preceding verse.²¹ This would be a fairly uncontested interpretation if a γάρ had been inserted at the beginning; indeed, a few manuscripts (mostly Byzantine) do include this γάρ.²² But the most reliable manuscripts do not, and this γάρ cannot be assumed as original.²³

Lightfoot is opposed by nearly all other scholars, who confidently take it as an imperative verb—“Serve the Lord Christ!” Lohse notes that an imperative δουλεύετε resumes the imperative ἐργάζεσθε in verse 23.²⁴ Moule asserts the following γάρ in verse 25 would “[lose] its point if it is an indicative,”²⁵ for then the two γάρ would pile up explanations upon each other—an unlikely construction. O’Brien also observes that verse 25 then gives the reason for this third imperative.²⁶ Primarily because of the missing γάρ among the reliable manuscripts in verse 24, and the subsequent inclusion of γάρ in verse 25, it is best to take δουλεύετε as an imperative that offers a final exhortation for action—“Serve the Lord Christ!”

Another point of interest in this brief sentence is the designation τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ, for “the Lord Christ” does not occur anywhere else among the Pauline Epistles, as both were originally titles, not proper names.²⁷ Yet, by the time of Paul’s writings, “Christ” had pretty much evolved into a proper name for Jesus.²⁸ Many scholars believe “Christ” is added to contrast Jesus

²¹ Though Dunn is an advocate for the indicative for these reasons, he admits the awkward nature of this sentence. However, he notes that this would make a threefold emphasis on Christ Jesus as the slaves’ Lord: verses 3:22, 23 and here in 24 (Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 257).

²² Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, 295: Manuscripts that include γάρ: “D(bc) K L most mss., Syr. (both), Arm. Goth.” Manuscripts that do not include γάρ: “Sinaiticus A B C D* 17 *al.*, Vulg. Copt. Euthal. (Tisch. cod.)” He summarizes: “It was clearly added to make the connexion (sic) easy.”

²³ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 161; Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 131.

²⁴ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 160.

²⁵ Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 131; Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, 295, remarks that Lightfoot fully neglected to address the γάρ in verse 25.

²⁶ O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 229.

²⁷ Though Romans 16:18 has τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν Χριστῷ (“our Lord Christ”)

as Lord against other “lords,”²⁹ with N.T. Wright paraphrasing its meaning: “so work for the true Master—Christ!”³⁰ In keeping with the high christology of this letter, Paul asserts that the Lord he is referring to is Christ, not God the Father.

The motivation given for this final imperative is a warning, though to whom this warning is addressed is not immediately clear. In its syntactical location between exhortations to slaves and to masters, verse 25 could be offering a warning to slaves, or to slaveholders, or even to both. The commentators consulted are nearly equally divided between these three options. In favor of slaves, Lohse, O’Brien and Wright stand on the fact that “masters” are not formally addressed until 4:1, which forms a break in the syntactical flow.³¹ As such, this verse functions as a final prod (the “stick” after the “carrot”) to warn slaves that just because they are chattel without legal rights any shoddy work will not go unnoticed by the Lord, nor because they are Christians will the Lord excuse any wrongs they commit. O’Brien specifically notes that ἠδίκησεν is also used in reference to the slave Onesimus’ wrong against his master in Philemon 18.³²

In favor of masters, Abbott in particular offers some strong exegetical support. First, the sense of προσωποληψία (“favoritism”) would appear to reference a person higher in position.³³ Here the masters are reminded that in the end the Lord will not show favoritism to them because of their social status here on earth. Second, when masters are formally addressed they are exhorted to be “just” (τὸ δίκαιον) to their slaves, which is a related verb to ἀδικῶν and possibly reveals

²⁸ Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 131.

²⁹ As do Lohse, 161; O’Brien, 229; and Moule, 131.

³⁰ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 150.

³¹ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 161; O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 230-231; Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 150.

³² O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 230-231; also Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 229.

³³ Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, 295.

some “wrong” already done by the Colossian masters.³⁴ This would then be a warning to masters that the Lord will repay them any wrong they do to their slaves. Third, the parallel verse in Eph 6:9 also directs the word προσωποληψία quite clearly to masters.³⁵

In favor of both slaves and masters, Dunn and Lightfoot believe that this warning “is suggested by the case of the slave, but it is extended to the case of the master”;³⁶ “it encouraged harshly treated slaves that their masters could not escape . . . the final judgment . . . and it warned the slaves themselves to maintain their own high standards of integrity.”³⁷ Indeed, Schweizer believes this sentence was deliberately a vague construction so that it could apply to all.³⁸

I stand with those who believe this warning is specifically directed to masters, though because of the imprecise subject (ὁ ἀδικῶν) slaves would also be led to take it as a gnomic warning that applies to anyone. The exegetical evidence given above supports this warning as extending toward masters. The rhetorical force would then be, “Slaves, wholeheartedly serve the Lord Christ by obeying your masters, as in the end you will receive your reward from the Lord and he will give equal retribution for every injustice you receive now from their hands, for he will not show them favoritism like they now receive on earth.” In this manner, the shift in address in 4:1 would not matter, for Paul is still speaking *to* the slaves but he is speaking *of* their masters to give them comfort, while at the same time adding final incentive by the warning’s generic (and brilliant) ability to apply to them as well.

³⁴ Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, 295; O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 230.

³⁵ See O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 230.

³⁶ Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 229.

³⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 258

³⁸ O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 231.

Paul finally addresses the slaveholders in 4:1. He exhorts them to offer τὸ δίκαιον and τὴν ἰσότητα to their slaves. Δίκαιον comes from the noun δίκαιος, a very common word in the New Testament generally meaning “righteous” or “just;” here in the neuter form, BDAG 2003 defines it as “that which is obligatory in view of certain requirements of justice, *right, fair, equitable,*” and specifically in Col 1:4 as “give what is right.” Ἰσότητα is not as common, existing in the New Testament only here and in 2 Cor 8:13, 14. Louw and Nida 3281 define it as “equality” or “equal,” and BDAG 3745 narrows this definition here as “the state of being fair, *fairness.*” The two uses in 2 Corinthians are in the context of financial equality, and this, with Louw and Nida’s definition, has led a few scholars to suggest that equality, as in the abolishment of slavery, is in view here, though all others soundly and rightly reject this interpretation.³⁹ Others acknowledge that emancipation is not the idea here, but the masters are to view their slaves as equal “brothers in Christ”—much like Paul’s admonition in Phlm 16.⁴⁰ Interestingly, both of these words frequently appear together in the writings of Greek philosophers and Jewish ethicists.⁴¹ “Just” and “fair” is how most commentators translate these two words, though there are several suggestions given on how the slaveholders were to apply them to their slaves. Some advocate fair wages,⁴² others take it as “even-handed, impartial treatment,”⁴³ while others say it

³⁹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 259-260, notes that while Greek philosophers such as Seneca and Philo can use this term in reference to slaves meaning humanitarian treatment, “the idea of equality of treatment for slave and free *in law* was an impossible thought for the time.” The entire previous call for slaves to obey their masters, along with all other such passages in the NT, does not offer any evidence that anything so radical as emancipation is insinuated in this brief word.

⁴⁰ Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* 296.

⁴¹ Aristotle regarded these words as synonyms (Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 230); Seneca used them to advocate humane treatment of slaves (O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 232), and others such as Plutarch and Philo discussed the close relationship between these two terms (Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 162).

⁴² In a sense Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 450, following Aristotle’s definition: “true justice consists in allowing each person to receive not the same reward but rather that which is their due”; O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 232, notes: “the idea of honest remuneration might be implied . . . especially as παρέχεσθε rendered ‘treat’, literally ‘grant,’ is paralleled by ‘what is fair’.”

denotes what “is in accordance with the judgment of a fair mind.”⁴⁴ At any rate, “any harsh measures of repression or victimization of those in a helpless position are clearly ruled out.”⁴⁵

Paul now offers an ironic motivation for justice and fairness, the causal εἰδότες ὅτι paralleling 24a. As slaves are told to obey their “lords” because of *the* “Lord—Christ,” the “lords” are told to be just and fair with their slaves because they also have a “Lord in heaven” to whom they are equally, ultimately accountable.⁴⁶ His word-play on κύριος again serves his purpose. This theological reason is in contrast to the typical Greco-Roman self-interested calls for justice solely to maintain peace in the household and increase productivity.⁴⁷ Lohse offers an excellent summary of the ramifications of this distinctly Christian motivation: “If both realize that they owe obedience to the one Lord, so both have in hand the true standard for their conduct toward one another.”⁴⁸ Here again, motivation in light of the Lordship of Christ is brought to the forefront.

In this rather lengthy exhortation to slaves, with a brief word to their masters, Paul aptly pinpoints that proper attitude of the heart, stemming from a proper understanding of one’s position before the Lord Christ, is the key to proper Christian behavior. Unlike extra-biblical demands for the external obedience of slaves, Paul strikes (literally) at the heart, with a call for passion and thoroughness in their work, for their service is to be directed first toward their Lord Christ. Such a command for both inner and outer obedience would then be far more burdensome than the

⁴³ Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 230.

⁴⁴ Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, 296.

⁴⁵ O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 232.

⁴⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 260, remarks, “having the greater power in relation to their slaves, the possibility that they would abuse that power and therefore have greater liability in the final judgment was the greater. Here the ultimate sanction may be the only one that could be effective, given the legal power of the master over his slave.”

⁴⁷ Catherine Hezser, “The Impact of Household Slaves on the Jewish Family in Roman Palestine” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 34 (Winter 2003): 392-393.

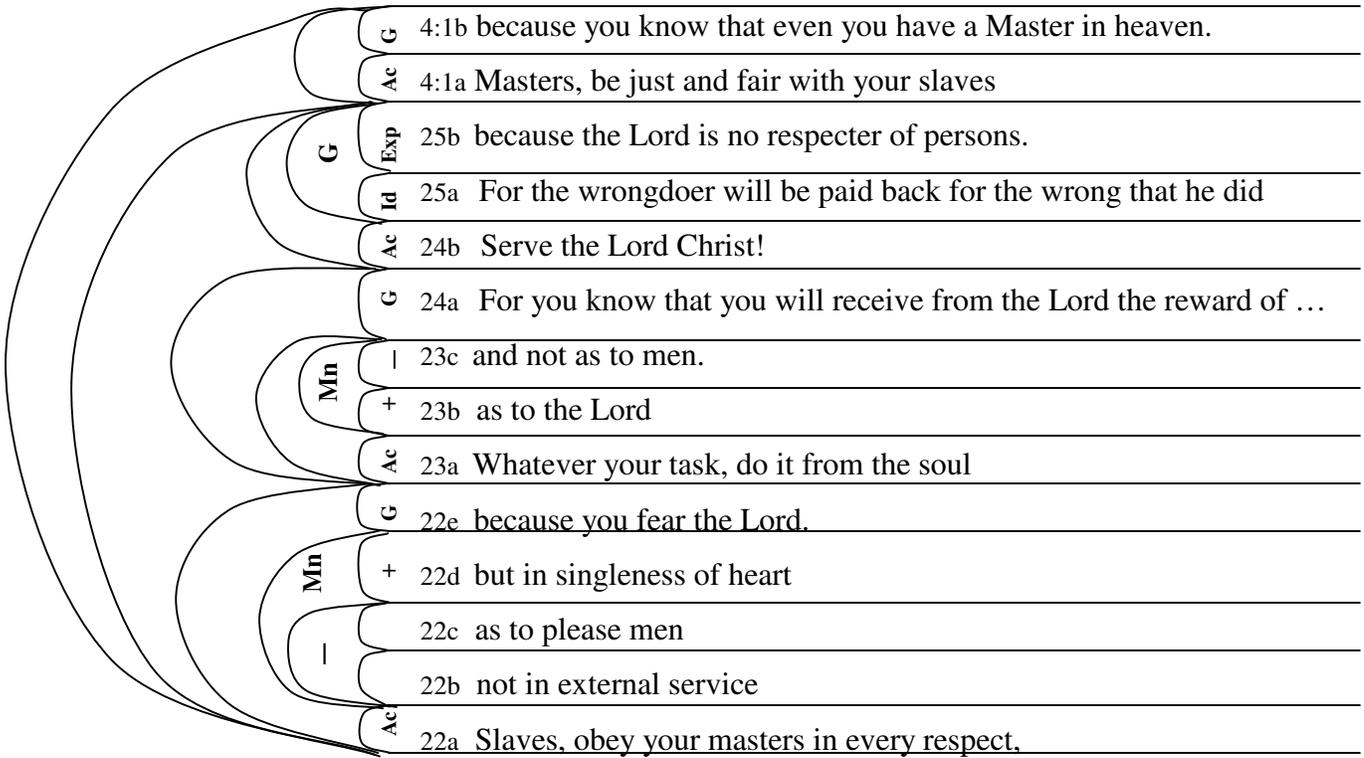
⁴⁸ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 162.

Hellenistic exhortations, but Paul strategically offers to slaves the hope of an eternal inheritance in contrast to the inheritance they would never be able to receive on earth, and soothes their fears of injustice by reminding them that the Lord will one day bring about retribution for wrongs committed, and will give no special honor to those who command honor here on earth. And to their masters, Paul reminds them that they themselves are slaves to a “Lord in heaven,” who sees all and will not tolerate or leave unpunished any injustice and unfairness they commit. Therefore, no Christians, no matter their earthly status, are exempt from the call for wholehearted, quality service to their one Lord in heaven—Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX I: GRAMMATICAL DIAGRAM

- 22 Οἱ δούλοι,
[ὕμεῖς] ὑπακούετε τοῖς κυρίοις,
κατὰ πάντα κατὰ σάρκα
μὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ
ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι,
ἀλλ'
ἐν ἀπλότητι
καρδίας
φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον.
- 23 [ὕμεῖς] ἐργάζεσθε ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ
ἐὰν ὁ [ὕμεῖς] ποιῆτε, καὶ
ἐκ ψυχῆς [ὡς] οὐκ ἀνθρώποις,
- 24 εἰδότες ὅτι [ὕμεῖς] ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν
ἀπὸ κυρίου τῆς κληρονομίας.
- [ὕμεῖς] δουλεύετε τῷ κυρίῳ
Χριστῷ
- 25 γὰρ
ὁ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὃ ἠδίκησεν,
καὶ
[ὁ κυριὸς] ἔστιν οὐκ προσωποληψία.
- 4:1 Οἱ κύριοι
[ὕμεῖς] παρέχεσθε τὸ δίκαιον τοῖς δούλοις,
καὶ
τὴν ἰσότητα
εἰδότες ὅτι ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον
καὶ ἐν οὐρανῷ.

APPENDIX II: ARCING DIAGRAM



APPENDIX III: EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

Slaves, obey your masters here on earth in *every* respect, not just superficially doing your work for their eyes alone or in order to placate them. Instead of fearing them, fear your heavenly Master, and use this reverence as motivation for service that comes from a sincere and focused heart. Again, in *whatever* you do, do it wholeheartedly, with your entire soul put into it, since in your work you are serving *the* Master, and not humans alone. Do this, remembering that you will one day receive from your heavenly Master the great reward of his glorious inheritance that he has promised you. Again, I exhort you to serve *the* Master—Christ! Do not fear any injustice or harm, for the Master will repay anyone who is unjust in equal measure for his wrong deeds, as this Master is not awed by earthly status, and He will give each his due.

Masters, always be just and fair with your slaves. For I do not need to remind you that you yourselves are slaves to the Master who is in heaven, and you are accountable to Him for how you treat your earthly slaves.

EXEGETICAL ISSUES IN COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

Laura Welker, 2066

I. Col 3:24: Debate Over the Verb Mood of δουλεύετε: τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε

The primary problem is whether to understand δουλεύετε as an indicative verb or an imperative, for this form is identical for both. An indicative would be translated as “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” and an imperative would be translated as “Serve the Lord Christ!” Though the meaning is similar for both, the purpose for this brief sentence would differ according to the mood chosen.

A. Indicative Meaning. J.B. Lightfoot, 229, is the chief proponent for the indicative, followed by Dunn, Dibelius-Greeven, Conzelmann, the NIV, RSV and most other English versions. His exegetical reasons are:

1. “The indicative is wanted to explain the previous ἀπὸ κυρίου” to signify that Christ is the one who grants the “reward of the inheritance,” as there is (unusually) no definitive article for this κυρίου
2. “The imperative would seem to require ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ, as in Ephes. vi. 7 (the correct text).” But as the verb preceding this phrase in Eph 6:7 is a participle, this is not a strong argument.
3. A reason not given by Lightfoot is that Paul is again emphasizing who is the slave’s primary κύριος — Jesus Christ—and provide further motivation for the preceding verse. Dunn, 257, observes this would make a threefold reference to Christ as the slave’s Lord: 3:22, 23, and here in 24.

This would be a fairly uncontested interpretation if a γάρ had been inserted at the beginning. A few manuscripts do include this γάρ but the most reliable manuscripts do not, so it cannot be assumed as original.

B. Imperative Meaning. Lightfoot is opposed by nearly all other scholars, who confidently take it as an imperative verb.

1. Lohse, 161, notes that an imperative δουλεύετε resumes the two imperatives of verses 22 and 23.
2. Moule, 131, asserts the following γάρ in verse 25 would “[lose] its point if it is an indicative,” for then the two γάρ would pile up explanations upon each other—an unlikely construction.
3. O’Brien, 229, summarizes both of these reasons, noting that δουλεύετε is a reassertion of ἐργάζεσθε, and then verse 25 gives the reason for this exhortation.

Primarily because of the missing γάρ among the reliable manuscripts in verse 24, and the subsequent inclusion of γάρ in verse 25, it is best to take δουλεύετε as an imperative that offers a third and final exhortation for action—“Serve the Lord Christ!”

II. Col 3:25: Debate over the Subject of this Warning: ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὃ ἠδίκησεν. Does the generic ἀδικῶν refer to slaves, masters, or both? In its syntactical location between exhortations to slaves and to masters, it could be either, and commentators are equally divided as to whom it references.

A. Slaves: Proposed by Lohse 161, O’Brien 230-231, and Wright 150.

1. “Masters” are not formally addressed until 4:1, which forms a break in the syntactical flow.
2. ἠδίκησεν, related to ἀδικῶν, is used for the slave Onesimus’ wrong against his master in Philemon 18.
3. As such, this verse functions as a final prod (the “stick” after the “carrot”) to warn slaves against shoddy work or disobedience.

B. Masters: Proposed by Abbott 295, along with Martin and Conzelmann.

1. The sense of προσωποληψία (“favoritism”) would appear to reference a person higher in position.
2. In the next verse, masters are exhorted to be “just” (τὸ δίκαιον) to their slaves, which is related to ἀδικῶν
3. The parallel verse in Eph 6:9 directs the word προσωποληψία quite clearly to masters.
4. This verse is then to warn the masters that the Lord will avenge any wrong they do to their slaves.

C. Both: Proposed by Dunn, 258 and Lightfoot, 229

1. It is suggested by the case of the slave, but it is extended to the case of the master.
2. It encouraged harshly treated slaves yet warned the slaves to maintain high standards of integrity.
3. This sentence was deliberately a vague construction so that it could apply to all.

I stand with those who believe this warning is specifically directed to masters, though because of the imprecise subject (ὁ ἀδικῶν) slaves would also be led to take it as a gnomic warning that applies to anyone. The exegetical evidence given in point B is most convincing. The rhetorical force would then be, “Slaves, wholeheartedly serve the Lord Christ by obeying your masters, as in the end you will receive your reward from the Lord and he will give equal retribution for every injustice you receive now from their hands, for he will not show them favoritism like they now receive on earth.” In this manner, the shift in address in 4:1 would not matter, for Paul is still speaking *to* the slaves but he is speaking *of* their masters to give them comfort, while at the same time adding final incentive by the warning’s generic (and brilliant) ability to apply to them as well.

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