

**Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (22):
"Be subject..." (part 3)**

This is the third Lord's Day that we are addressing the paragraph of Colossians 3:8-4:1. It contains practical instruction for the Christian in his relationship with those of his own family and with those in the workplace. And as we stated last week, a clear teaching of these matters reveals how wayward our society has departed from God's will. We have forsaken the standards that God has established in His creation, commandments by which He governs and will judge the world. The instruction before us reflects a Christian worldview, one which is no longer the norm in much of western society. But even we who profess to be Christians find that we have transgressed His laws respecting these matters. But we know that believing and conforming to the Word of God is the way of blessing in God's world. This is the way to experience and enjoy life in the fullest way possible, even life in abundance.

Now the ways of God are not natural to fallen man. Due to man's sin, his conception of what is right, of what is best, of what will bring benefit to him, has become distorted and perverted. What seems to be natural, reasonable, and right to a sinful man, is often contrary to God's ways and are, therefore, very detrimental to man's well-being and for those with whom he relates. As the wise man once wrote, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 16:25). But people are clueless that the way they are living will lead to their ruin. "The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble" (Prov. 4:19). But in contrast to that one who lives in conflict with God's Word, the one who is humble before the Lord, who acknowledges his own ignorance and his need for the Lord's instruction, he will be blessed in his way. Proverbs 10:17 records, "He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray." And similar to this but in reverse order we read, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise" (Prov. 12:15).

The need for correction and instruction in the will of God undergirds the whole of Scripture. We are to live according to God's will. The subject of "wisdom" that is frequently set forth in the Scriptures, describes one who knows God's will; the wise man has come to see and interpret the world from God's perspective. The Scriptures frequently use the word, "understanding" in conjunction with "wisdom." "Understanding" is knowing how to apply that wisdom to day-to-day life. This is the nature of wisdom literature that we find in the Holy Scriptures. This is what Solomon set before his son toward the beginning of the Book of Proverbs.

Happy is the man who finds wisdom,
And the man who gains understanding;
¹⁴For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver,
And her gain than fine gold.
¹⁵She is more precious than rubies,
And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.
¹⁶Length of days is in her right hand,
In her left hand riches and honor.
¹⁷Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.
¹⁸She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy are all who retain her.

¹⁹The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
By understanding He established the heavens;
²⁰By His knowledge the depths were broken up,
And clouds drop down the dew.

²¹My son, let them not depart from your eyes—
Keep sound wisdom and discretion;
²²So they will be life to your soul
And grace to your neck.
²³Then you will walk safely in your way,
And your foot will not stumble.
²⁴When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.

Here we read of the benefits and blessings that God brings upon the one who has wisdom and applies that wisdom in his understanding of how to live in God's world. There is God's blessing on the one who lives according to God's Word. There is God's curse on the one who disregards God's word and who lives according to his own thinking and will.

Let us read again our passage, which is Colossians 3:18-4:1. Here we have very clear and simple instruction for Christians in the manner they are to relate to others in God's world.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²²Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. ^{4:1}Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

We have already considered the details of the instruction recorded here. God has established order in His world. He has instituted the family and has established an order in which He will bless a family. He is not only the Lord over the marriage relationship, but He is Lord over the work place also. He has established an order in which He will bless the man or woman in the work place.

One of the main principles set forth here is that the Christian is to regard his work as unto the Lord. In other words, even though he may labor in a secular firm, if that work is legal and righteous, then the Christian is to regard himself as having the Lord as his supervisor or employer in that employment. Knowing this and laboring with this knowledge should infuse value and significance to your labor.

Now as we pointed out last Lord's Day, this Christian understanding of labor has been pre-eminent in western civilization since the early days of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. This worldview became known as "the Protestant Work Ethic." This Protestant Work Ethic has been attributed as foundational to western society and the cause of its great economic and social advancement in the last five centuries.¹ **Martin Luther**, and then later even more so, **John Calvin**, called Christians back to a biblical world view regarding the Christian in the world. Whereas in the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic doctrine had declared that a Christian was most devout and pleasing to God by being celibate, single, and monastic (being isolated from the world), the reformers taught rightly that the biblical, the most blessed state, is that of the married life (although there is a giftedness in the Lord's service for remaining single) and "Christian" service in one's calling, or vocation, i.e. in the work place. All legitimate work for the Christian is Christian ministry unto the Lord in His world. This is what our text declares. And there will be a day in which the

¹ Actually, an early 20th century economist and philosopher, Max Webber, set forth this understanding of history in his seminal book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904). For a further description of the Protestant Work Ethic and a slight corrective to Webber's views, see a short article written by Edward Veith for Ligonier Ministries (<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/protestant-work-ethic/>).

Lord will compensate the Christian even for the secular labor or service that he rendered in this life. As the Scripture declares:

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

Now I would like us to consider more fully and more carefully how we are to regard our labor and particularly our relationship to our supervisor or employer. For although it is not difficult to understand some of the principles that we have set forth, the application does not come easy. It takes both knowledge of God’s Word (i.e. wisdom) as well as the grace of the Lord to empower His people so that they may apply wisdom to their lives (i.e. understanding). Let us consider several biblical principles that should govern our dealings with those in authority over us.

1. Our labor in the workplace is to serve the supervisor or employer that the Lord has placed over us.

Our Lord Jesus taught and demonstrated the nature of Christian service. He declared to His disciples,

²⁴Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. ²⁵And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ ²⁶But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. ²⁷For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? *Yet I am among you as the One who serves.*”

Here we read of our Lord Jesus teaching His apostles that the ways of His people in His kingdom are distinctly different than the ways of the world. The “Gentiles”, and what is meant by that term in this context are unbelievers, live in a world in which everyone is vying for authority in order to have others serve them. Oh yes, they have a pretension that they are the “benefactors” of others, but in actuality they are concerned for themselves. They want authority so that they can control others, telling them how they are to live. This is the view of authority of fallen man; this is the fallen world’s view of authority.

Actually the fallen world views authority as conferring at least two “privileges” to the one in authority. ***First, it is assumed that with a position of authority one has the right to control or dominate those under his authority.*** This is contrary to God’s law. But when people get into a position of power, and if they are governed by sinful nature, they will tend to dominate others. Perhaps they have been under someone else’s “thumb”, but now it is their turn to dominate others.

I saw this graphically displayed among the German people, a people who are very conscious of human authority. I spoke with a local government bureaucrat in the town in which we lived, Starnberg, Germany. He told me with a measure of disgust in his voice of how controlling all of German society was toward its citizens. There are rules and regulations that are imposed on the German people that address every area of life. There is a right way to do things, and this is the German way, as ones in authority have determined for its citizens. (Example of neighbor on a snowy day.) This German man told me that he was very sick and tired of Germans who obtain a little authority for they then seemed to delight in imposing their way and to make life difficult for people under them. He told me that since he now had a position of authority in the community, he would get his turn, his chance to get even by making everybody else’s life difficult and miserable. The attitude was, “I’m in authority here; you will do what I tell you to do.” This reflects the way of thinking that the fallen world has regarding authority.

A second assumption that the fallen world has of one in authority is that by virtue of his position, he has a right to be served by others. People in authority are too often driven by selfishness. The thought is this: “I am the boss and you are here to serve me.” And so, when fallen people get into positions of authority, whether it is a husband in the home or a supervisor in the work place, these are the kinds of attitudes that are displayed and the kinds of actions seen. “I’m the boss here, and you must serve me and my

interests.” When the Lord saw His disciples acting in this manner, He essentially said, “Cut it out. Lost people act that way!” Our Lord said to His disciples in **Matthew 20:26** and **27**, “It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.”

All authority that we acquire should be employed in *servicing others*, not expecting or demanding that they serve us. Authority is never to be used to gain dominance or control over others--that is self-serving and self-exalting. We are to be servants, using the authority with which we have been entrusted to serve others, ministering to their practical needs as well as their spiritual needs. This includes providing instruction, exhortation, encouragement, rebuke and correction, if needed. Our Lord taught that if you are one of the “greatest”, that is, the one who has authority, you should use it as though you were the “youngest”, having no rights or claims for others to serve you, but only responsibility to serve others about you.

In the passage we read our Lord set forth the example of how the Christian is to exercise authority. We read in Matthew 20:27, “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.” Later in the passage He declared how it was He served others. We read Jesus saying to His disciples, “*Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*” (20:28). In contrast to those of the world who assume that the one with greater authority may expect or demand to be served by others, our Lord was serving others with the authority that had been given to Him. He never used His authority to manipulate or bring personal benefit to Himself. He was devoted to serving His Father, serving the poor and needy, serving His disciples, by healing and instructing in the Word of God. The sign of maturity and greatness as far as the Lord is concerned is:

1. The one who does not ask, “What’s in it for me?”, but rather, “what may I give to others.”
2. The one who does not say with defiance, “I’m not being fed”, but asks sincerely, “How might I feed others.”
3. The one who is not saying angrily, “My needs are not being met”, but asks, “How might I meet the true needs of others.”

Our Lord regards this kind of “servant” as great in the Kingdom of God.

When our Lord said of His purpose, “*to give His life as a ransom for many*” (20:28), we see His work of atonement set before us. He gave His life as a *ransom*. This speaks of a payment price that our Lord paid for the release, for the freedom of His people. When Adam sinned, the whole human race was placed in slavery. We are slaves to sin, the condition from which we need to be redeemed. As a slave would be purchased in the slave market, our Lord purchased us with the price of His own blood. He “served” us in redeeming us through the sacrifice of Himself on the cross for our sins.

We are to have a servant spirit wherever we serve the Lord. In whatever station of life we find ourselves, whether it is in the home or workplace, we are to be servants, not looking out for our own concerns, but purposing to serve others. But practically speaking, how does that play out in life?

2. Our labor of service in the workplace should be to fulfil the desires and achieve the goals of our supervisor or employer.

When we speak of serving, we should understand this to be embracing the responsibility and opportunity to achieve the goals of those the Lord has placed over us. And so, a servant’s spirit is not simply a grudging surrender, acknowledging and yielding to the place that God has placed us. It is the active intention to accomplish the tasks and fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to you by the one in authority over you.

Our desire and motivation should be to make our supervisor or employer successful. When a supervisor or employer perceives this is your attitude or approach to your employment, do not be surprised if he or she moves to promote you, giving you more authority, for has learned that you will be faithful to execute your authority on his or her behalf.

Please forgive me for citing personal experience. Last week I commented about my dad and that, although he was not a Christian, lived and raised my sister and brothers with the kinds of desires and attitudes that would be suitable to whatever work we gave ourselves. When I became a Christian, and upon reading the Holy Scriptures, these principles were easily recognized by me, but I now possessed a desire to please the Lord, and so I gave myself to apply these principles to my work. When Mary and I were newly married, I was a clerk in a grocery store. The manager, Bob Bailey, was known as a hard man to work for. Nothing seemed to be good enough for him. No one seemed to care to work for him. But I gave myself to his service. I worked hard and was faithful and creative in my work. I enjoyed my labor, for it was unto the Lord. I recall one time when he was attempting to rebuke and correct me about something in the backroom. I was listening and taking it in. He said to me abruptly, "Will you stop smiling at me? How am I supposed to be mad at you, if you're smiling at me?" I apologized, and told him it was my goal to make him look good. My desire was to make him the best manager possible for that store. As the months passed he tried to promote me, which was not easily done or welcomed by others in a labor union controlled work place. When I was 21 years old, after having worked for him for about 3 years, I gave him notice due to my intentions to move to Texas and enter the Christian ministry. He became very upset with me. The reason given was that he had fully intended to place me in management.

We served in Texas for several years. I gave myself over to serving in the church in visitation and teaching classes. After three months the senior pastor of our church of perhaps 1500 in attendance, hired me as an associate pastor. (I have been serving in churches since then for the past 42 years). After three years of ministry in that position, Mary and I planned to move back to California to be involved in a church plant with a friend in the Sacramento area. When I told my pastor of our intention, he expressed great concern and regret that I was leaving. He asked me to go for a ride with him (in his big, long, Lincoln sedan). To my surprise, he offered me a very prominent ministry position in the church. He offered to pay me any salary I requested. He even told me that he would promote me to replace his present "second man" on the church staff, one with whom he had served for 20 years in the ministry. Now it was not because I was someone "great", but he told me that I exhibited zeal and a servant attitude in ministry that was not common, and, therefore, was of great importance and value to him that he retain my service there. I was flattered, but was already convinced that we were to assume the ministry position of no promised income or future in California in starting a new church in the Sacramento area. The point that I am trying to make is that a genuine servant's attitude and approach to work is not all that common, even in the church, but especially in the secular workplace. But when someone in authority sees that attitude and resolve displayed in you, do not be surprised if he or she wants to see you promoted where you can be even more resourceful and useful to him and his goals.

Now I realize my words alone have no real weight except to the degree that they can reflect or illustrate biblical principle and example. **The Joseph story** in Genesis 37 through 50 that records a number of decades of Joseph's life. That story reveals to us the way that God works through the principles that we have set before us.

Joseph was the second to the youngest son of the twelve sons of Jacob and Rachael. He was Joseph's favorite son, which resulted in jealousy and anger toward him by his brothers. You know the story. His brothers unjustly beat him and sold him into slavery in Egypt. But Joseph had a way about him that was quite special. He had a servant's heart and he sought to serve the one in authority that God had placed over him. Joseph was first sold as a slave into Potiphar's house. And there he served his master faithfully. And so, Potiphar conferred more authority to Joseph, resulting in Joseph eventually becoming his steward. Here is the account from Genesis 39.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. ²The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. ⁵So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the

LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. ⁶Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. (Genesis 39:1-6)

Of course, as the Lord would have it, Joseph encountered the treachery and deceit of Potiphar's wife. The result was that Joseph was thrown into prison. But there also Joseph's servant spirit was manifest. And so, the keeper of the prison promoted him to a position of authority. We read of this also in Genesis 39.

¹⁹So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused. ²⁰Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. ²¹But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²²And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. ²³The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper. (Gen. 39:19-23)

Joseph was in prison unjustly and for an extended period of time. But he was faithful in his service to others, and even did so when that faithfulness was not immediately rewarded. He accurately interpreted the dreams of the butler and the baker, but the butler later forgot his debt to Joseph. But in God's timing Pharaoh summoned Joseph to his court. For Pharaoh had a dream and it was made known to him that only Joseph had the ability to interpret rightly to him. After Joseph declared to him the impending seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine, and he told Pharaoh how he could best provide for his people through this period of history, Pharaoh exalted Joseph, becoming prime minister of Egypt. We read of it in Genesis 41.

³⁷So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. ³⁸And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?"

³⁹Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." ⁴¹And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

⁴²Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

While Joseph was in the position of authority, he faithfully served Pharaoh. Joseph served Pharaoh's interests. Joseph eventually brought the entire nation into submission and ownership to Pharaoh. We read of this in Genesis 47.

²⁰Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh's. ²¹And as for the people, he moved them into the cities, from one end of the borders of Egypt to the other end. ²²Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had rations allotted to them by Pharaoh, and they ate their rations which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their lands.

²³Then Joseph said to the people, "Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. ²⁴And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones."

²⁵So they said, “You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants.” ²⁶And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, that Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, which did not become pharaoh’s.

Our labor of service in the workplace should be to fulfil the desires and achieve the goals of our supervisor or employer.

3. Our labor of service in the workplace should be governed by the principles of the law of God, whom we ultimately serve.

We live in a world of sinners. There are times in the workplace, or the family, or society, when the Christian is asked or expected to do something that he cannot do. Either a direct command in the Word of God prohibits him from carrying out the directives given to us, or our conscience sensitized to the faith will not permit us to act in the manner that we are directed.

We read of the Jewish leaders commanding the apostles to preach no longer the name of Jesus Christ within the environs of Jerusalem. Obviously this was a law being imposed upon the apostles by the authorities over them, a law they could not obey. They had a higher responsibility to their Lord who commanded them to teach and preach the gospel to every creature. And so, we read of the apostles’ response to these leaders in **Acts 5**.

²⁶Then the captain went with the officers and brought them (Peter and the apostles) without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. ²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, ²⁸saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!”

²⁹But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

³³When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. ³⁴Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. ³⁵And he said to them: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. ³⁶For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. ³⁷After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. ³⁸And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; ³⁹but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”

⁴⁰And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴²And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:26-42)

We read of another occasion where the people of God refused to obey authorities that commanded His people to do what they could not do and remain true to God. We read in **Daniel 3** of the three Hebrew youths who refused to bow down and worship the image of King Nebuchadnezzar.

¹Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ²And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; ⁶and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

⁷So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. ⁹They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; ¹¹and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹²There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

¹³Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? ¹⁵Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²²Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. ²³And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

²⁵"Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (Dan. 3:1-25)

Now there are some "Christians" who would claim that they are "taking a stand for Christ" by belligerently defying the directives of those that God has placed in authority over them. But this is wrong. Rather than exhibiting a submissive and compliant spirit, one by which they are to serve others, they react

and rebel, while claiming to be faithfully serving the Lord. This is not right. When the Lord puts us in a place in which someone in authority directs us to act in a way contrary to our faith, we are to attempt to appeal politely and properly to that authority, even while we purpose to do the will of God. A good illustration of this may also be found in the prophecy of Daniel. Let us turn to **Daniel 1**.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

³Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. ⁶Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

⁸But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ⁹Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. ¹⁰And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

¹¹So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³"Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." ¹⁴So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

¹⁵And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. ¹⁶ Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

¹⁸Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. ²⁰And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. ²¹Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus. (Dan 1:1 NKJ)

When the chief of the eunuchs told Daniel and his friends that they would be placed on a diet that had been dictated by the king, Daniel did not immediately respond with a strong refusal. Oh yes, he had committed before the Lord that he would not "defile" himself in so doing, but he did not respond to this man placed over him with a rebellious spirit or defiant words. This chief of the eunuchs was carrying out a directive given to him by the king. His desire and motivation for prescribing this diet to Daniel and his friends was not evil. And so, Daniel appealed to him. He proposed an alternative, but one that would result in the goal of the chief of the eunuchs to be realized. The result was blessed of the Lord. "Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king."

Our labor of service in the workplace should be governed by the principles of the law of God, whom we ultimately serve.

4. We are to serve others with a real, genuine, desire for the well-being of all people about us.

God called Jeremiah to minister to His people after Babylon had conquered them and had taken them into exile to Babylon. They would be there for 70 years before the Lord would enable them to return to the Promised Land. After they returned to the Promised Land, they would one day receive the salvation that God would bring to them through the Promised Messiah. But until their return, God gave them instruction on how they were to order their lives while living in Babylon. We read this in Jeremiah 29.

Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²(This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) ³The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying,

⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:

⁵Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. ⁶Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. ⁷***And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.*** (Jer. 29:1-7)

This instruction is applicable to us. We are as sojourners, or exiles in the world. As such we, too, are living in “Babylon”, which is an emblem of this fallen world system. The instruction applies to us, including these words, “***And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.***” Yes, they were to build their houses and expand their families, but they were not to be self-serving only. They were to seek the well-being of the city in which they lived. So too, we are to seek the well-being of those in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in the cities in which we live. We are to seek the wellbeing of our employers. We should rejoice in their success that the Lord enables us to promote in the workplace. We should not envy them. We should not be jealous of them, but rather, we should rejoice with God’s blessing having been bestowed upon them. May our Lord enable us to have both wisdom and knowledge in all of these matters.

²⁴Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, ²⁵to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)