

# Colossians 3:23-25

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-3/colossians-323-25/>

*Paul summarizes his plea to the Colossian believers and offers the incredible incentive therein.*

It is uncertain whether these last couple of verses are meant to be a continuation of Paul's instructions to slaves ([see commentary on Colossians 3:18-22](#)) or if they are meant to be a sort of conclusion that applies to everyone. Considering the universal application of these statements (regardless of status or station), the latter seems most likely. In any event, this section is a consistent application of what has come before.

Paul gives the Colossian believers a summation of what he has been saying throughout Chapter 3. *Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.* Paul is more interested in the mindset believers adopt than naming exact and precise actions for every possible scenario. *Whatever you do* leaves room for discernment. It keeps the call to an admonition for sound behavior rather than a checklist, and ushers it toward becoming a way of life.

In the phrase *do your work heartily*, the English translation of *heartily* is two Greek words – “ek” (a preposition meaning “from” or “out of”) and “psyche” (which means “life,” “breath of life,” or “soul”). So “ek psyche” means “with all your being.” Paul is saying, *whatever you do*, do it with your entire soul, every bit of life within you. Let the depth of who you are flow out of you. Rather than superficial or obligatory *work*, make your effort a matter of the heart.

To do one’s work *heartily* (with all your being) is to do it *as for the Lord*. What Paul means here is that God is our Creator. He has designed us for a purpose. When we work from our “psyche,” our soul, we honor the intent behind our Creator. We put ourselves in alignment, which is a way of pleasing Him and also the only way to live our best life. Of course, using a tool according to its design is the way toward maximizing its effectiveness.

In contrast to this is doing one’s work *for men*. When we orient ourselves toward people-pleasing, we act out of a yearning for the affirmation of others rather than the truth set within us. This is often directly at odds with who Christ is and what he invites us to be as he dwells within us.

The Greek word translated *work* is “ergazomai.” It is variously translated as “deed,” “wrought,” and “minister.” Throughout the New Testament, it is applied to individual acts, general acts, specific deeds, secular jobs, and religious duties. Given the context of Chapter 3, it would seem to encompass all decisions of any sort, for any person in any station of life: children, parents, husbands, wives, employers, and employees.

Paul is presenting two paths we can choose, regardless of the endeavor in which we are engaged: 1) Living *as for the Lord*, or, 2) living *for men*. In the first instance, our primary goal will be to gain the approval of God. In the second instance, our primary goal is to gain the approval of men.

If we desire the approval of men, our primary fear is rooted in what others think of us and our utmost concern is to avoid human rejection. If we desire the approval of God, our utmost concern is to do whatever we do in a manner that would be pleasing to Him.

Why choose the path of the Lord? Paul has already said it is where one's work/efforts in life should be aimed. He now says why: *knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance*. The Greek word for *knowing* here is not the word for head knowledge ("gnosko"). It is "eido," which means "to perceive" or "to see." Paul may be reminding the Colossian believers that they have seen this; their experience has told them that the path of the Lord is best for them. He also might be admonishing them to know by faith, as faith is the assurance of things not seen, believing them as surely as you might if you had seen with your eyes (Hebrews 11:1).

What is it they have perceived? That *from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance*. In modern language, the idea of *the reward of the inheritance* sounds paradoxical. We are used to an *inheritance* being associated merely with the wishes of the patron. Perhaps it is a parent or relative who passes away and leaves something in their will.

In scripture the idea of an *inheritance* is a common theme throughout. In fact, the word *inheritance* appears over two hundred times in the Bible. One example that might resolve the paradox between *reward* and *inheritance* is found in God's grant of the Promised Land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants. The same Greek word translated *inheritance* here in Colossians 3:23 is also found in Hebrews, speaking of Abraham and the Promised Land:

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."  
(Hebrews 11:8)

Abraham received a grant of the land as a *reward* for his faithfulness. God promised Abraham this reward if he would meet three conditions:

- Leave his home, in Ur (Babylon) (Acts 7:2; Genesis 12:1)
- Leave his family (Genesis 12:1)
- Go and dwell in the land God would show him (Genesis 12:1)

Abraham obeyed in part, traveling halfway, to Haran. But Abraham did not leave his family, nor make it all the way to the Promised Land (Genesis 11:31). Then Abraham left Haran and made it to the Promised Land, but did not fully leave his family, taking his nephew Lot (Genesis 12:4). Once Abraham parted company with Lot, fully completing the conditions, then God granted him the land (Genesis 13:14-15).

God granted the land to Abraham as a *reward* for faithfulness. This grant of land is also called an *inheritance*, even though it is a *reward*. This is proper because 1) all things belong to God, and 2) no one can cause God to be obligated to them. All rewards God gives are due to His mercy.

Just as God granted a reward to Abraham for faithful obedience, God will grant a reward to New Testament believers who leave the comfort of living in the world (things below, v. 2) and do what they do (in word or deed) *heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing* (believing) *you will receive the reward of the inheritance* (things above, v. 2).

Jesus overcame rejection, temptation, persecution, and death. He was faithful in obeying the will of His Father in the face of all this opposition. He promises a reward to any of His servants, those who have already been given the free and unconditional gift of being born into His family, any who overcome the fear of human rejection, looking to *the Lord* for approval, *and not to men.*

Christ will share His *reward* with those who overcome the flesh and the things of the world, as listed in Colossians 3:5-6. He will share His reward with those who do whatever they do in word or deed *heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.*

This is an astonishing prospect. As Paul states in the last epistle he wrote, when he anticipated his death: “If we endure, we will also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12a). Paul goes on to say that if we do not endure, and are not faithful, we will still be God’s child. Because we are in Christ, God would deny Himself if He denied us as His child (2 Timothy 2:13). But *the reward of the inheritance* depends on whether we endure faithfully, as Jesus endured.

Jesus told a number of parables that provide some insight into what the rewards will look like. In the parable of the talents, the master’s servants who were diligent in investing their talents were rewarded by being given increased responsibility (Matthew 25:21, 23). The “wicked, lazy” servant in Matthew 25 made a deliberate decision to avoid being faithful because he knew that the master would only ask him to do more, assigning him an unwanted increase in responsibility.

Paul began Chapter 3 ([see commentary on Colossians 3:1-4](#)) by talking about aligning with the glory of Christ, which is from above. Paul asserted that believers have died with Christ and are spiritually raised with Him, and now share His life; our life is “hidden in Him.” They will also be raised to a new body in a physical resurrection, and “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed” (returns again) “then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). The *inheritance* of the believer is to be in relationship with God, which is an unconditional gift, and to share in His kingdom based on God’s reward.

To participate in God’s kingdom, to contribute to it significantly, and to bear witness to it is the abundant life to which we were created. This leads to the greatest treasure and the invitation that God makes possible through Jesus Christ.

Paul says it this way: *it is the Lord Christ whom you serve.* He is the King of all Creation. *The Lord.* Everything else we encounter is a circumstance, a setting. It is an opportunity to serve the Lord with our lives. That, Paul suggests, is what truly matters. And no matter what the challenges or triumphs are, we ought not to make an idol of the setting or circumstances; they are not the “lord.” Jesus is the *Lord.* We can remember that every circumstance is an opportunity to serve God. When we serve God, we are actually sowing to our greatest true self-interest.

Paul ends Chapter 3 with a warning: *for he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong he has done*. Literally, “the one who causes hurt will receive hurt.” There is a lot in this phrase. First, Paul is telling the believers that there is true justice, each action has a consequence. And there is no excuse for *he who does wrong*. It doesn’t matter what difficult circumstances they were in or what the people around them were saying or doing. A person is judged by their own character. And any who cause harm will reap those consequences, no matter their excuses.

The other side of this is Paul telling the Colossians to not be so focused on what others are doing. As Jesus stated in His Sermon on the Mount, we should not focus on judging others. Rather we should focus on the reality that God will judge us using the measure with which we measure others (Matthew 7:1-2).

When we try to be judge and jury for the people around us, we not only elevate the standard by which we will be judged, we also create a blind spot in our own lives. We lose focus on our own reality. Rather than steward our character, we try to steward theirs. That can then lead to us neglecting our own choices and instead pursuing the illusion that we are responsible for the choices of others.

Paul makes it clear: people will receive the consequences of their actions. It is not up to any of us to do this on God’s behalf. We are each called to steward our own choices, as unto the Lord. If we work heartily, *as for the Lord rather than for men*, then we have the promise that God will give us an immense reward, the *reward of the inheritance*.

To seek the *reward of the inheritance* is to seek the things that are above. It is the human nature (from below) to encounter verses like the instructions in this chapter and use them as ammunition rather than as correction for ourselves. For example, husbands might use the verses directed at wives to hurl expectations at women, rather than take to heart the instructions given to them, and focus on loving their wives.

There is no place in this conclusion to Chapter 3 for anyone to weaponize any of these instructions. Paul clearly does not offer these admonitions as a basis upon which to measure others. He offers these instructions to guide each believer to be a good steward for our true Lord, who is Jesus. This is the way to gain the most from our lives.

So, if you are a husband, focus on the instructions to husbands! Husbands can encourage their wives, but they will make their own choices, and will answer to God. The same is true for women, and parents. It is tempting for all of us to assume we are doing our part well, and what the world needs is for us to tell others how to do theirs. Paul is trying to free us of that illusion and bring us into reality. God is the true judge, and His judgment is true and righteous altogether (Revelation 16:7).

Paul adds at the very end that these *consequences* will be received *without partiality*.

We are invited to steward our life in alignment with the design by which Christ created us. In that lies our greatest possible fulfillment. Christ does not give special treatment according to

wealth or position. All will be judged accordingly. Paul's message is clear: Don't miss out on the opportunity to reap the benefits of the *reward of the inheritance*!

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,<sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.<sup>25</sup> For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.**