Wholehearted Service As Unto God

Colossians 3:22-24

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During the time that Paul wrote this letter to the church in Colosse, Gnosticism was on the rise and false teachers and doctrines were sprouting up left and right. This caused confusion and division among the church there and people were being led astray. Paul writes this letter to the Colossians to negate these false teachings and to remind them of the glorious work of Jesus Christ in their lives. This paper will focus on Colossians 3, verses 22 to 24, in which Paul emphasizes what Christian service should look like. He writes,

“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (NKJV).

The term “bondservant” translated from the Greek word doulos, meaning slave, referred to someone who had no rights of their own. Here, Paul uses this term as a contrast to emphasize “highest dignity” for believers who “willingly live under Christ’s authority as His devoted followers” (HELPS, 2011). It is interesting to see that no matter what a person’s social status, God has made it possible to “attain the very highest in the Christian life through faithfulness to the word of God” (MacDonald, 1995, p. 2014). We must also keep in mind that Jesus came, not to be served, but to be Servant of all (Mark 10:45).

This passage is particularly relevant to my sense of calling to wholistic care because the very nature of the nursing profession is to be a servant to the patients. Servants should work hard and obey their masters with sincerity of heart out of fear for God, not man. The Lord is the one who will reward service in the end because it is really Him who I serve when I do good works on earth or toward man.

God has called me to work hard as a nurse and to continue learning as I develop in my career, not for praises from people who think being a nurse is impressive, but because God has called me first of all to do it, and second of all because I love and fear God. My work should not be done so extravagantly that it impresses others. Though it is human nature to want to receive praise from others about our own accomplishments, I must do things out of pure intentions to please God. This means asking myself, "does what I'm doing bring glory to myself, or does it bring glory to God? Did I do this because it was the right thing to do in God's eyes, or did I do it to get recognized by others?"

I often found myself asking those same questions every Sunday that I led worship at my church. I know God gave me the talent to sing, and I started serving in worship to glorify God and serve His people. As time went on and people began to recognize me and compliment me about my gift, and it became routine. I found myself having to constantly reorient myself to the reason I was there, asking if I was singing to hear praises from the congregation rather than simply singing to bless God. It was hard to tell the difference because leading worship for a congregation was so public. Worship should be intimate time spent with God, and I felt that being on a stage put the focus on me no matter how sincere my intentions were to put the focus on God.

Nursing, in a sense, is much the same. It is a hard job. We do it because we have been given the gift to connect with people in a way that heals the body and soul. Patients and their families love to credit the nurses that care for them and their loved ones, and rightly so because much of what they do could not or would not be done by anyone else. And even more so because we are now dealing with their very lives, people tend to connect deeper with nurses. I have to constantly remind myself that these are people who God loves, whether they believe in Him or not. The work I will be doing as a nurse will be done not for the praises from those whom I will be serving, but because God loves them, and they deserve to be treated sincerely and lovingly.

This is especially important to remember in times when the job may seem unbearable due to either the workplace environment or because the patient situations are hard to deal with. There will be times when coworkers will be mean and nasty or the hospital will change their policy on something that makes work harder. If it does not go against any biblical doctrine or belief, then I should continue to do my job as if I were working for God or treating Him as a patient. Even more importantly, I should be able to listen to God's still small voice when patients don't seem to get better or when there seems to be little hope of recovery for them. At the end of their life, they have a right to die with dignity, and it is the nurse's job to treat them with sincere love and tender care. At this point, the only opinions that matter belong to the patient and God, and in serving the patient, God is blessed and pleased.

Verses 23 and 24 of Colossians gives the command that should work as a standard for all Christians: "and whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." (NKJV). This provides the framework that guides my ongoing practice, not only in life, but in my career as a professional caretaker. The term “heartily” can mean “in a sincere manner” which would make perfect sense within this context; everything I do as a nurse should be done in a sincere manner, and I should not cut corners. Another meaning of the term “heartily” can also be defined as “thoroughly or vigorously” (OED, n.d.). This is also applicable to the context of this scripture because in order to do a good job with something, I must be thorough and work diligently or vigorously toward my goal. With passion like this, patients can rest assured knowing I will do everything in my power to get them the care they need and deserve.

In the Believer’s Commentary (1995), the author writes that this verse teaches us that God can be glorified even in the most menial of tasks, and that “the humblest service can be glorified and dignified by doing it for the Lord” (p. 2015). So this means that when I begin working as a nurse, I will be given big things and small things to do, and God will use all of it, even the small things that seemingly do not matter much, for His glorification and my edification. Though pay raises and plaques with my picture on it are some of the great benefits of recognition in the workplace, my true rewards are in heaven; not for the good works I’ve done on earth or how successful I was at accomplishing goals, but for my faithfulness to God. I must remember that when I am called upon to do something I do not want or like to do, it is a testimony to Jesus Christ to do it without complaining and to do the best job possible.

Some of the basic principles derived from this passage that will inform my worldview and vocation include being obedient to my superiors and employers. Though I have no Master but Jesus Christ, this passage clearly says that I am to “obey in all things your masters according to the flesh” (v.22). I am to be sincere in my work and not just look like I’m serving on the outside. Strive to do a good job, especially when no one is looking. God is looking, and He is looking at my intentions. The work I do is for an audience of One. My rewards are in heaven.

Though it is tempting to slack off at work, I must remember that even though my bosses and coworkers may not be looking, God is always watching me, so I should do the best job possible. It would be a good thing for me to think about my patients as though each of them were Jesus, because in Matthew 25:40, He explains that whatever we do for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned, we have done to Him. God has a special place in His heart for the destitute and oppressed of this world, especially widows and orphans (James 1:27, Malachi 3:5).

As I journey down this road toward professional nursing, I find myself often pondering the tremendous task I am taking on. To take care of people seems complicated enough, but when I stop and think of what that really means, I often feel completely overwhelmed. I must be able to bathe them, feed them, teach them, and talk to them. I must be able to give medications, know the reasons why they need them, and know if anything they are currently taking will interact with those medications. I must be able to think quickly and critically at the drop of a dime, because if I don't, it could have disastrous consequences. As scary as these things may sound, they encompass the job of a servant. Serving people in obedience to God and not for the praise of man will reap rewards for faithfulness to His word. Serving heartily means making sure the patient is getting the right medication and the right dose. It means I will clean up the bedridden patient’s bottom after they have had an accident. It means I will be a voice for the patient when they no longer can speak for themselves – and to do all these things without complaining, with love and compassion.   
  
  
 

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