

Colossians 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

Analysis

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven. Paul addresses slaveholders, balancing servants' duties (3:22-25) with masters' responsibilities. "Give unto your servants that which is just and equal" (to dikaiōn kai tēn isotēta tois doulois parechesthe, τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἴσοτητα τοῖς δούλοις παρέχεσθε) commands fair, equitable treatment—providing what's right and balanced, not exploiting power advantage.

"Knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven" (eidotes hoti kai hymēis echete Kyriōn en ouranō, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε Κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ) provides accountability: earthly masters answer to heavenly Master who judges impartially (3:25). No earthly authority exempts from divine accountability. This radically limited masters' power and elevated slaves' dignity—both serve the same Lord, creating brotherhood transcending social hierarchy.

Historical Context

Roman masters had nearly unlimited power over slaves, including physical punishment, sexual use, and execution. Paul doesn't directly attack slavery's institution but transforms the relationship through mutual Christian identity. Masters treating slaves justly and equitably was countercultural and subversive to Roman social order. Over centuries, Christianity's influence eventually delegitimized and abolished slavery by undermining its moral and theological justifications.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do you treat those under your authority—employees, children, students—with justice and equality?
2. Does remembering your accountability to God affect how you exercise earthly authority?
3. What modern forms of exploitation parallel ancient slavery that Christians should oppose?

Interlinear Text

Oἱ κύριον τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἴσοτητα τοῖς
G3588 Masters G3588 that which is just also G3588 equal G3588
G2962 G1342 G2532 G2471

δούλοις παρέχεσθε εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε
unto your servants give knowing that also ye have
G1401 G3930 G1492 G3754 G2532 G5210 G2192

κύριον ἐν οὐρανοῖς
Masters in heaven
G2962 G1722 G3772

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 17:14 (Parallel theme): These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

James 2:13 (Parallel theme): For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Ecclesiastes 5:8 (Righteousness): If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.

Revelation 19:16 (Parallel theme): And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

James 5:4 (Parallel theme): Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

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