

You Also Have a Master

COLOSSIANS 4:1 (WEB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

Whatever power you have over another person's day or paycheck, you hold it under a Boss in heaven who's watching how you use it, so the way you treat the people beneath you is really the way you're answering to him.

Opening Lines

Paul just spent a whole passage looking the enslaved man in the eye. Now, in one single verse, he wheels around and stares down the man who owns him. Watch how few words it takes to knock the most powerful person in the house off his throne.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get everyone with any authority — a boss, a parent, a customer at a checkout — to feel that they are not the top of the chain, that Someone is watching how they use it. If one person changes how they'll treat somebody beneath them this week, you've hit it.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the extended Roman-law history if time runs short; you only need enough to feel that masters owed slaves almost nothing. Don't cut the moment where you land 'you are never the highest authority in the room.'
- Where the moment lives: In naming one specific person whose day or wages depend on a decision you'll make this week — and deciding, out loud, to treat them justly. Not in the theology of kyrios, but in that one name.
- Your prep: Come having done the fairness audit yourself: who reports to you, who serves you, who you owe money to. Walk in already convicted about one of them so your teaching has teeth.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

0–8 min: classroom opening (silent vote, then defend — stand by window or door on whether Paul went far enough, defend your wall). 8–14 min: read the verse, set the Roman-law weight (masters owed slaves almost nothing). 14–24 min: teach kyrios with the two-hand image; land 'you are never the highest authority in the room' and let silence sit. 24–40 min: discussion questions 3–5, protecting time for 5. 40–45 min: name commitments out loud, big idea, spontaneous prayer over the names. Transformation happens at question 5. Cut first: the Roman-law history down to two sentences.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

0–10 min: small-group opening (go around, name one person your decisions affect). 10–16 min: read verse, brief Roman-law weight. 16–26 min: teach kyrios with hands, land the keepable line, silence. 26–48 min: discussion questions 1–5, going deep, One Thing Deeply on kyrios — resist tangents. 48–58 min: each person names their one person and one action. 58–60 min: pray the names back to God. Transformation happens in the naming at 48–58. Cut first: question 2 if the fairness discussion is already rich.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

0–5 min: coffee opening (last time you were short with someone serving you). 5–10 min: read the verse together, say the kyrios point plainly — same word for both. 10–22 min: walk questions 4 and 5 only. 22–28 min: each name one person and one thing you'll do. 28–30 min: short honest prayer over those names. Transformation happens when they say the name out loud. Cut first: skip straight to question 5 if time's tight.

One Thing Deeply

This is the same drill you ran back in weeks 3 and 13 — pick ONE thing and go all the way down instead of skating across five. That's a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach; this week we drill it deliberately, and harder than before. Level 4 rep: this passage is one verse. You have no room to spread out, so the temptation to pad with tangents is enormous. Your job is to choose ONE word — kyrios, the word that is both 'master' and 'Master in heaven' — and spend real minutes there while resisting every other rabbit trail that opens up (slavery ethics, Roman law, workplace policy). When someone tries to pull you sideways, gently say 'hold that,' and come back to the one word. If you can make the whole room feel the weight of that single doubled word, you've taught the verse.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people in your room will never own a slave, so they'll assume this verse is museum furniture. It isn't. Every one of them holds power over somebody — a kid, an employee, a subcontractor, the teenager who mows the lawn, the person who bags their groceries. And almost none of them think of themselves as 'the master.' That's exactly the blind spot Paul reaches into. In a world where Roman law gave a slaveholder almost total freedom to feed or starve, reward or flog, Paul turns and says something that must have landed like cold water: you also have a Master. You give orders down here, but Somebody gives orders to you. That single upward glance flattens the whole household. The man at the top and the person he owns answer to the same throne, the same word — kyrios. Teach this well and someone in your room stops seeing their authority as theirs to spend however they like. They start seeing it as leased, watched, and answerable. That's a rare and holy thing to hand a person. You get to be the one who tells a room full of quiet bosses and tired parents that they are not, in fact, the highest authority in any room they walk into. Few verses do more with fewer words.

Catch the Fire First

Before the room does anything, you do the fairness audit out loud on yourself. In front of them, name one real person whose day or paycheck depends on you — an employee, your kid, the contractor you still owe, the person you were short with at a counter. Say honestly whether the load you've handed them is one you'd accept, or whether you've been coasting on the fact that they can't push back. Don't fix it in front of them; just confess it plainly. When they see you put your own hand up first as 'the master' in this verse, the room stops treating this as a passage about ancient slaveholders and starts hearing it about themselves.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time you had real power over someone's day or wages — an employee, a team, a kid — and you used it lazily or unfairly because you knew they couldn't fight back.
- A moment you realized someone above YOU was watching how you treated the people below you, and it changed what you did.
- A time you learned the name of someone the world had decided was invisible — the server, the cleaner, the delivery driver — and it changed how you saw them.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'I've always believed in treating everyone with dignity.' Real — 'I made the new guy stay late three Fridays running because he wouldn't complain, and I only stopped when I imagined my own son being treated that way.' Tell the second kind.
- Guardrail: keep it real, not raw — one honest, finished moment, not a live wound you're still bleeding from in front of the room.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Here's a two-sided question. Did Paul, by writing this one verse instead of demanding masters free everyone, go far enough — or did he cop out? Stand by the window if you think this verse quietly undid slavery from the inside; stand by the door if you think he should have called for its abolition outright. Pick a wall. Now — convince the other side."

Silent vote, then defend — commit a position physically before discussing, so the quiet ones lock in independent judgment before the confident talker frames it.

SMALL GROUP: "Go around fast: name one person whose day gets easier or harder based on a decision you make. A kid, an employee, a customer, a neighbor. Just the role, one word. Now hold that person in your mind, because this whole verse is about you and them."

Start where they already live — surface the room's own experience of power before touching the text.

COFFEE: "Quick one. Last time you were short or cold with someone serving you — a waiter, a cashier, whoever — did you think even for a second that they answer to God exactly like you do? Paul writes one verse to people with power, and that's the whole

thing he wants them to remember."

One concrete question beats a lecture — put the verse's teeth into an ordinary moment.

Teaching the Word

One word carries this verse: *kyrios*. It's the word behind 'master' AND behind 'Master in heaven' — Paul uses the exact same word for both on purpose. Do this physically. Hold one hand up high and say, 'This is the master — he gives the orders, he's the top of the house.' Then lift your other hand higher still, above the first, and say, 'And this is his Master — same word, *kyrios*, the One he answers to.' Let the top hand drop. The man who thought he was at the top just found out there's a hand above his. That's what one word does to him. Say it slow and then stop: You are never the highest authority in the room. [Let the silence sit. Don't rescue it.]

Discussion Questions

1. When you hear the word 'master' in this verse, who do you picture — and does it ever occur to you that it might be YOU?

Coaching note: Most will picture an ancient slaveholder, a stranger. Gently keep pressing until someone realizes they're a boss, a parent, a customer. Don't answer for them; let the recognition dawn.

If it stalls: Simpler: name one person who has to do what you say. Anyone. A kid, a coworker, someone at work. That's who this verse is talking to.

2. Paul gives masters exactly ONE verse. Why do you think he didn't just command them to free everyone?

Coaching note: Let the tension sit — some will feel he dodged. Steer toward the source card's point: he planted a truth no master could hold and stay the same. But don't shut down the discomfort too fast; it's honest.

If it stalls: Yes or no: can you keep treating someone as property once you truly believe they answer to the same God you do?

3. What actually changes about how a person uses power the moment they believe they have a Master watching?

Coaching note: Push for specifics — not 'they'd be nicer' but what they'd DO differently on Monday. The Apply card gives you calendar, wallet, and words as three angles to draw out.

If it stalls: Concrete: think of the last decision you made that affected someone else. Would you have made it the same way if your own boss — or God — was standing right there?

4. The verse ties two words together — 'just' and 'equal.' Where in your ordinary week does one of those get quietly ignored?

Coaching note: 'Just' points at wages and workload; 'equal' points at how you speak to people who serve you. Let people land on whichever one convicts them. Silence here is good; let it work.

If it stalls: Easier: do you know the name of the person who most often serves you — coffee, groceries, deliveries? If not, that's 'equal' getting ignored.

5. Name one specific person whose day or paycheck depends on a decision you'll make this week. What would treating them 'just and equal' actually look

like?

Coaching note: This is the whole lesson landing. Get names or roles, not principles. Don't let people generalize their way out of it. This is where transformation happens — protect the time for it.

If it stalls: Even simpler: just say the one name or role out loud. We'll figure out the 'what' together.

Questions You May Hear

"Isn't it a problem that Paul just tells masters to be fair instead of condemning slavery?"

Under Roman law a slave was legally property, not a person who could even bring a case. Paul cuts against that whole assumption by saying something IS owed to the enslaved person, and by putting the master under the same Owner. That truth quietly undid the institution from the inside, not by revolt but by planting something no master could hold and stay the same.

"Why does he say 'Master in heaven' — is that God or Jesus?"

It's Christ. The same Lordship we met back in chapter one, where all things were made through him and hold together in him, comes down here to one man managing one household. And this Master didn't wield his power by grinding the weak — he came not to be served but to serve, and gave his life as a ransom.

"Does this really apply to employers today, or just to literal slavery?"

Yes, it applies. James 5:4 warns employers who cheat their workers that the cries of the unpaid reach God's ears, and Colossians 3:25 says there's no partiality in his judgment. Anyone with power over another person's livelihood is the 'master' in view.

"What does 'just and equal' actually mean — equal how?"

It means treating the enslaved person as one to whom something is genuinely due, and as an equal before God. Ephesians 6:9 spells it out: God 'shows no partiality' between master and slave, so the earthly hierarchy dissolves before the throne of the one Master over all.

For Experienced Leaders

- Watch for the room to distance itself into ancient history. The moment someone says 'well, we don't have slaves,' agree — then ask 'so who do you have power over?' and don't let go.
- The two-hand image (master, and the Master above him) is worth practicing before class so your hands are confident. A fumbled gesture kills the moment; a clean one lands the whole verse.
- Don't moralize the wallet point about paying people. Just say it plainly — pay the contractor, pay the teenager, on time, in full — and let the specificity do the convicting.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud one name — the person whose day or paycheck depends on a decision they'll make this week — and one thing they'll do to treat them justly. Names, not principles.

Close by praying out loud over the specific names people just spoke — the employee, the kid, the contractor, the server. Don't reach for a written prayer; say those actual people's names or roles back to God and ask him to make these folks just and equal to them this week.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3, that's fine — the real work is in questions 4 and 5, so if you have to choose, sacrifice the earlier discussion to protect the naming at the end.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, text each person one line: 'Did you do the thing for [their person]? No wrong answer — just checking.' It turns a nice discussion into an actual change.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/colossians/4-1/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- One person who has to do what you say (a kid, a coworker, someone you manage):
- kyrios means both 'master' and 'Master in heaven' — the same word. In your own words, what does that do to a person who thought they were at the top?
- Where does 'just' (fair workload, fair pay) get quietly ignored in your week?
- Where does 'equal' (how you speak to those who serve you) get ignored?
- One name: the person whose day or paycheck depends on a decision you'll make this week —
- What treating THEM 'just and equal' would actually look like:

Take-home actions:

- Before your next one-on-one or shift assignment, ask whether the load you're handing someone is one you'd accept yourself. If a task is piling onto one person while another coasts, redistribute it before the day ends.
- If you owe someone money — a cleaner, a contractor, a teenager who mowed your lawn — pay the full agreed amount today, on time, without shaving it or making them ask twice.
- Learn one name this week — the person who serves your coffee, bags your groceries, takes your order — say thank you and mean it, and treat them as an equal before God, because they are.

You are never the highest authority in the room.