You Also Have a Master

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

The Big Idea

You are never the highest authority in the room, and the way you treat the people under you is being watched by the One you answer to.

Opening Lines

One verse. That's all Paul gives the slaveholders of Colossae, and he lands it right on their heads.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get every person to see the invisible Master standing over their own authority — over their kids, their staff, the cleaner they hired. By the end they should feel the ceiling above their own head.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the deep-dive on Roman slave law if time runs short; you need enough to show the law required almost nothing of masters, not a lecture on imperial legislation.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the moment someone names a specific person under their authority and admits how they've been treating them. Abstract 'authority' changes no one; naming the babysitter or the direct report does.
- Your prep: Know that 'master' and 'Master' are the same Greek word, kyrios, and that Paul stacks them on purpose. If you own that one fact cold, the verse preaches itself.

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

Classroom opening with the Roman-law fact (5 min). Teach kyrios with the two-hands image (10 min). Questions 1–2 to the whole room (8 min). Silent-vote question 4 — stand and defend (10 min). Question 5, the gospel turn (7 min). Commitments out loud and close (5 min). Transformation lives in the silent vote — bodies commit before mouths do. If short, cut question 2.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening round — everyone names who they have authority over (7 min). Teach kyrios (10 min). Questions 1–3, slow, personal (20 min). Silent vote question 4 (10 min). Question 5 (8 min). Commitments and spontaneous prayer over the actual names (5 min). Transformation lives in question 3 — the weak-spot admission. If short, cut the vote and stay in question 3.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — the late-paid babysitter (3 min). Read the verse, teach kyrios plainly with the two hands (7 min). Straight to questions 1 and 3 (12 min). Question 5, gospel turn (5 min). Each names one thing to fix, pray briefly over it (3 min). Transformation lives in question 3. If short, skip question 5 and just get one honest commitment each.

One Thing Deeply

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. The temptation with a one-verse text is to sprint sideways into ten cross-references to fill the time. Resist it. Pick one thing and go down, not out. This week the one thing is the word kyrios — the same word for the earthly master and the heavenly one. Do not let yourself teach anything else with the same depth. Everything else in the lesson serves that single collision: the man giving orders is himself under orders. When you feel the urge to add a second big point, cut it. A room remembers one thing taught to the floor far longer than five things brushed on top.

Why This Passage Matters

Most of your room will never own a slave, and within thirty seconds some of them will quietly file this verse under 'not about me.' Your whole job is to close that gap, because it is emphatically about them. Every person in that room holds authority over someone — a child, an employee, a team, a contractor they pay, a parent they now care for. Roman law required almost nothing of a master; he could feed or starve, reward or flog, and no court would trouble him. Into that world Paul says: give what is right and fair, because you also have a Master in heaven. He points straight up. The man at the top of the household discovers he is himself a servant, standing under an Owner who sees exactly how he treats the people beneath him. That is a truth that reorders ordinary life — how you write the email, how you assign the weekend shift, whether you pay the babysitter on time. You get to hand people a mirror they didn't know they needed and then show them the eyes watching them in it. That is a privilege. Teach it like one.

Catch the Fire First

Before you stand in front of anyone, do the exercise yourself. Name one specific person you have authority over — not 'my team,' a name. Then ask the hard version of the Apply card's question: would that person call you fair when you are not in the room? Sit with the actual answer. If there's a wage you owe, a task you keep dumping on the same person, an email that dripped with contempt, write it down. You cannot ask the room to name the person they've been unjust to if you walked in without naming yours. Walk in already convicted, already carrying one concrete thing you're going to fix this week, and the room will smell that this is real.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time you held authority over someone and used it badly — the shift you always dumped, the tone you took because you could.
- A time you were on the bottom of someone else's authority and it taught you what fair felt like.
- A moment you remembered mid-action that someone was watching how you treated a person who couldn't fight back.
- SAMPLE (polished vs real): Polished — 'I've always tried to lead my team with fairness and integrity.' Real — 'I gave Marcus every Saturday shift for four months because he never pushed back, and I knew it, and I kept doing it.'
- Guardrail: real, not raw — tell the version you've already made peace with, not the one you're still bleeding from.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Under Roman law, a slave was property — legally a thing, like a plow. A master could starve him, sell him, flog him, and the law shrugged. Now listen to what Paul says to those exact men. [Read the verse.] He didn't tell them to be nicer. He put a Master over their heads."

Anchor the abstract in a hard fact so the room feels the stakes before the verse.

SMALL GROUP: "Quick round — name one person you have some authority over. A kid, someone at work, someone you pay. Just the relationship, one word. Good. Keep that person in your head, because this whole verse is about how you treat them."

Start with a question that makes everyone locate their own authority before you teach.

COFFEE: "When's the last time you paid a babysitter or a cleaner late because it was more convenient for you? No judgment — I've done it. There's a one-verse thing in Colossians that walks right into that, and it's sharper than you'd expect."

Disarm the 'not about me' reflex with an everyday example before the text.

Teaching the Word

The word to teach deeply is kyrios. Paul uses it twice in one breath and it's the same word both times — 'Masters' and 'a Master in heaven.' Kyrios means the one who holds rightful ownership and command, the one whose word settles it. Here's the physical picture: put your hand flat, palm down, and hold it at chin height — that's the master over his household, top of the pile. Now lift your other hand and hold it flat above the first one, higher. That top hand never moves in the slaveholder's imagination — he thinks his hand is the ceiling. Paul's whole verse is the second hand appearing. There is a hand over your hand. The man giving orders is under orders. He is not the ceiling; he is the floor of someone else's authority. That's why Paul doesn't argue self-interest or custom. He just points up. Every authority you carry, you carry under his. [Then say the line, and stop:] You are never the highest authority in the room.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is someone you have real authority over right now — the power to make their day easier or harder?

Coaching note: Push for names and specifics, not 'my team.' Don't let anyone off with 'I'm not really in charge of anyone.' Most people underestimate their own power.

If it stalls: Who's the last person who had to do something because you asked — a kid, a coworker, someone you paid?

2. Paul could have told masters to be kinder. Instead he points to a Master over them. Why does that reason land harder than 'be nice'?

Coaching note: You're after the shift from advice to accountability. 'Be nice' is optional; 'someone's watching you' is not. Let them feel the difference.

If it stalls: Does it change how you act when you know your boss can see your screen? Why?

3. The Apply card says fairness is measured by whether people would call you fair when you're NOT in the room. Would they? Where's your weak spot?

Coaching note: This is where it gets personal — protect it. Don't rush the silence. If you go first with your own weak spot, the room follows.

If it stalls: Is there one person who quietly gets the worse jobs because they never push back?

4. SILENT VOTE: Is it worse to underpay someone who won't complain, or to talk down to someone who can't talk back? Stand by the window for underpay, by the door for the tone. Now defend your spot.

Coaching note: Make them physically commit before anyone speaks — it locks in independent judgment so the quiet ones don't just echo the confident talker. The point isn't the 'right' answer; it's that both are the same sin — using power against someone who can't fight back. Draw that out after they defend.

If it stalls: If you can't stand, just raise a hand for one or the other — then tell me why that one bothers you more.

5. The Master in heaven bought his own servants with his blood and knelt to wash feet. How does being under a Master like THAT change how you hold your own authority?

Coaching note: This is the gospel turn — grace received becomes grace extended. Don't let it stay theological. Tie it back to the specific person from question one.

If it stalls: You've been treated better than you deserve by God. Who under you needs some of that same undeserved patience?

Questions You May Hear

"Why didn't Paul just tell them to free their slaves?"

He didn't call for revolt — he planted a truth no master could hold and stay the same. By putting master and slave under the same kyrios, he flattened the ground and undid the whole institution from the inside.

"Does this verse mean God approves of slavery?"

No — Paul is speaking into a system that already existed under Roman law, where slaves were legally property. He addresses the man with power and quietly dismantles the assumption underneath his power by giving him an Owner of his own.

"What does 'right and fair' actually mean here?"

It means treating the enslaved person as one to whom something is genuinely due — Roman law said justice was owed to a slave no more than to a plow. Paul's parallel in Ephesians 6:9 adds the key: God shows no favoritism between the master and the servant.

"Is 'master' and 'Master in heaven' really the same word?"

Yes — both are kyrios in Greek, and Paul sets them side by side on purpose. The one who holds command over the household is himself under One who holds command over him.

For Experienced Leaders

- With a one-verse text your instinct will be to pad with cross-references. Don't. Go down into kyrios and let the silence carry the weight.
- When someone says 'I don't have authority over anyone,' don't argue — ask 'who cleaned on your decision this week?' The power is always there; they just don't see it.
- The gospel turn in question five is the difference between a guilt trip and a lesson. Land the fact that they're under a Master who washed feet, or the room walks out heavier instead of freer.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud one name and one thing — the person they have authority over, and the one concrete thing they'll do differently this week: pay on time, take the tedious job themselves, rewrite the email.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names people just said — the babysitter, the direct report, the kid — and the specific fixes they named. Don't reach for a written prayer; naming their real words back to God is the whole point.

If you run out of time: If the room goes deep on question three and never reaches five, stay there. One honest admission of a weak spot is worth more than finishing the list.

Midweek follow-up: Text everyone midweek: 'Did you do the thing you named — the payment, the shift, the email? One word back.'

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

Handout

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During the lesson:

- Name one person you have real authority over right now:
- Would they call you fair when you're not in the room? Where's your weak spot?
- The same Greek word, kyrios, is used for the earthly master and the Master in heaven. Write what that stacking means to you in one sentence:
- Silent vote — worse to underpay the quiet one, or talk down to the one who can't answer? Circle one and write why:
- One concrete thing you'll do differently this week for the person you named:

Take-home actions:

- Pay someone this week exactly what you owe them, on time and in full — the babysitter, the cleaner, the contractor.
- Look at how the unpleasant jobs get assigned. Next time the tedious one comes around, take it yourself or spread it fairly.
- Before you send the next email correcting someone under you, read it back and ask if you'd want to receive it. If it drips with contempt, rewrite it.

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