

Sermon

Ephesians 6:5-9 Bringing Joy to the Toil

Two Preliminary Issues to Consider first:

1. **Does Paul condone slavery?** No, Paul was helping the church stand strong within the bounds of their existing society. Paul is encouraging the Ephesians with radical counter-cultural ideas, just like we've talked about with husbands and wives and children and parents. Yes, slavery existed in the New Testament, Paul never says he agrees with it, he just teaches the church how to live in it. Eventually, Christianity would lead the way to abolish slavery. So, don't get hung up on whether or not the Bible condones slavery, it doesn't. The gospel brings dignity and equality to the New Testament culture and to ours today as well.
2. **Is Work "good"?** "I thought work was just a necessary evil."

Let's look at Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15

^{ESV} **Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let us make man¹ in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{ESV} **Genesis 2:15** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

So, we see that we were created to work. It was good, work is good. God has given us this world to have dominion over it, to work it and to keep it, and to walk with Him as we do it. We say that Adam and Eve lived in "paradise." And work was part of it. Paradise was not being on a permanent vacation. Paradise was working and walking with God. Work was something that Adam and Eve "enjoyed." There was no stress or anxiety. Until...

The serpent comes in and deceives Adam & Eve, they fall for it and rebel against God. They sin by turning away from what God had told them to do and turn towards their own selfish desires. The devil didn't make them do it, they did it themselves. And the consequences were disastrous.

^{NIV} **Genesis 3:16-19**

To the woman he said,

"I will greatly increase your **pains in childbearing**;

with pain you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

¹⁷ To Adam he said,

"Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' **Cursed is the ground** because of you;

through **painful toil** you will eat of it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce **thorns and thistles** for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By **the sweat of your brow** you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Work is good but it is cursed. That is why work is hard, and painful, and stressful, work is toilsome. Not because work in itself is bad but because we are bad, we are sinful and we have brought this consequence upon the earth itself and upon our work.

But because God has not chosen to leave us to ourselves, He has chosen to redeem us and the world from sin by sending His Son Jesus, to rescue us from our sin and to redeem all of life back to Himself. And this brings us to

Ephesians 6:5-9 where we hear Paul exhorting the church to live out this gospel of redemption in the midst of their daily work. He calls on slaves to obey earthly masters and earthly masters to obey their heavenly master. Paul puts both in perspective and makes this radical claim that God shows no partiality to either slave or master, both are equal in His sight, both are created in His image and both are **Servants of Christ**.

Intro: "Does your wife work..."

So, let's take a look at these specific verses to see what the true meaning of work is and what it means for all of us to be Servants of Christ.

Since we are all Servants of Christ:

- We work to please Christ
- We work according to the will of Christ
- We work with the attitude of Christ

1. We Work to Please Christ (Our motivation to Work)

Because we are servants of Christ we have a new motivation for work and that motivation is to please Christ.

What are some wrong motivations for working?

a. **Working to please people:** Look at verse 6: "not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers..."

We don't work just to please people, we work to please Christ, ultimately, it's only his evaluation that matters. We all know how shallow it is to just try and please someone. And in reality we are only trying to please people so that "we look good." How shallow is that? It's very selfish.

Illustration: Some of you, like me, get an annual review, mine comes up this week. You sit down with a personal team and they evaluate your work over that past several months. It can be a scary meeting to go into. Your livelihood may depend on how they evaluate you. But what if you worked all year only to impress those particular people? That's like playing in the tidal pool, when you really need to be out in the deep waters. The tidal pool is safe, the deep waters are scary, even dangerous, risky, but I would imagine that your employer would rather you take some risks and possibly fail then to just play in the tidal pool and only get the bare minimum of work done. Plus, what God is saying is that you can work to please people but in the end what they think doesn't matter, only what God thinks really matters. And if you work to please Christ then you will work way harder, you will take greater risks, you will produce far more than if you just work to please people. Working for God is such a greater vision, it's so much bigger than just working to be a people pleaser.

b. **Working just to make a lot of money and get a lot of stuff.** Ecclesiastes 4:4 says this:

^{ESV} **Ecclesiastes 4:4** Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

A really poor work motivator is envy of what your neighbor has. But oh, how we fall into this trap. We call it "keeping up with the Jones's". We see that our neighbor has a new car, new lawnmower, their kids always have new bikes, they go on expensive vacations, their wives always have the latest handbags. So we think, "I've got to make a lot of money, so we can have all that stuff too."

But it's vanity, it's chasing after the wind. Again, it's small thinking. God calls us to think and dream and envision so much more than material stuff. God calls us to dream and envision working for treasures in heaven,

or as verse 8 says, we work... "knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord."

God wants us to be motivated by heavenly blessings, not earthly stuff.

Look, I pray regularly that you all prosper. For those who do not currently have a job, I pray that you will find one and that in the meantime God will meet your needs. For those who have businesses I pray that they

flourish and you make tons of money, for the salesmen I pray that you are the top salesman in your company and that you get fat bonus checks, it's ok to make lots of money. But why? Because God can use you and your money to bless others, to further His Kingdom, to build His church. Some of you have told me that it is your greatest joy to write out tithe checks to church, to missionaries, to families in need. That is fun and exciting. Having the right motivation for work brings eternal purpose and prosperity to the money you make.

Don't envy what your neighbor has, be glad he's been blessed with really nice tools, so you can borrow them and use your money to further the Kingdom. I have two tools I own but rarely see: extension ladder and a power washer. But I love letting people borrow those things. God has blessed me to have them and I am blessed when others can use them.

Our work is motivated by our desire to please Christ – not others, not myself.

2. Since we are all Servants of Christ, we work according to the will of Christ.

This is the REASON we work.

Verse 6 "...but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

Our work has purpose and meaning because, as we saw in Gen.1-2, God said that work was good.

Many of you have heard of the "Puritan Work ethic". Well, this phrase was coined because the Puritans saw great value in their work and therefore they worked hard.

But why?

The Puritans aspired to be "worldly saints", they considered themselves Christians with the earth as their sphere of activity and heaven as their only hope.

As Leland Ryken puts it, "by valuing all of life in relation to God, the Puritans gave sacred significance to every activity." The Puritans gave "sacred significance" to their work. They did not divide life into the sacred and secular, all of life was sacred, even their work. Don't think that all Puritans were pastors, they were farmers, mothers, blacksmiths, carpenters, they had everyday occupations like we do. But they saw God as the reason for their work, God gave meaning and purpose to their profession and their job.

In our culture we tend to make a distinction between the sacred and secular. You're a pastor, in full time ministry, I'm just a computer programmer. We need to understand that my work as a pastor is no more sacred than the computer programmer. We both work for the same Master, as the bumper sticker says, "My boss is a Jewish carpenter."

How does my job have "sacred significance"? Because you know who your true boss is and you work to redeem that area of life for the glory of God. As you sit at your computer and type out computer code, or deliver the mail, or add up figures, or change a diaper, or lead volunteers, you do it all for the glory of God. How you treat the people you work with is redemptive, how you come up with new ideas and better processes to make a better world is redemptive. The world is broken and full of thorns and thistles and weeds. God calls us to work and have dominion over everything for His glory. He wants us to pull up the weeds and plant the gospel seeds of grace, wherever we are, whatever He has called us to do. Remember, the passage says whether he is a "slave or free." Slave or master we do both for the glory of God.

The only disclaimer is if you have an occupation that is immoral and not something that God has called you to. A person can create websites for the glory of God, a person cannot create porn sites for the glory of God.

So the reason we work is according to the will of Christ for our lives. And we can find joy and sacred significance in it.

3. Since we are all servants of Christ we work with the attitude of Christ.

The attitude that Christ modeled in His life was one of humility, sincerity, sacrifice, obedience servanthood.

Look at Philippians 2:5-8

^{NIV} **Philippians 2:5** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very **nature of a servant**, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he **humbled himself** and became **obedient** to death-- even death on a cross!

What attitude does this passage point us to?

v. 5 **Fear and trembling**. Basically, we are to be humble servants of Christ, serving in our particular occupation, being subordinate to our earthly bosses with all **humility**.

v. 5 **With a sincere heart, as you would Christ**. Our attitude flows from our heart. If we really believe our work has sacred significance then our attitude at work will be to genuinely desire to work hard.

v. 7 **Rendering service with good will, as to the Lord, not to man**. We want the best for the people and the company we work for. We have the attitude of a servant, even if we are the boss.

If we take our Christ-like attitude into the workplace then we continue to unfold the redemptive process of redeeming that area of life back for the glory of God. Christians have a perspective on life that others don't:

- We have a joy in us that others do not have.
- We have hope in life and death and suffering that others don't.
- We have wisdom and counsel that comes from God that others don't.
- We have relational skills because of what Christ has done in our life that others do not have.

If you take these things into your workplace think of the blessing you will be to others, think of the bright light that shines as you walk through the door.

Illustration: Rob Leaches co-worker from the movie.

You get to bring joy to the toil. Your attitude can change and infect an entire company. Remember, Christ lives in you. You can't leave Jesus at home. Christ lives in and through you, let him work in and through you in your job.

Conclusion: Jeff & Kimra Green inviting Andreas and Imke to church and community group.