

June 18, 2017

Does Your Work Adorn the Gospel?

1 Timothy 6:1-2

In God's household people work for their employer as if it their job were a divine calling into ministry.

LTS: Psa. 122

This morning we as we continue studying Paul's first letter to Timothy we come to the very practical issue of our daily work? What do you do for a living? Do you sell cars, build fighter jets, count other people's money? Do you sell insurance, or work in a hospital? Are you a pilot, a school teacher, or factory worker. Maybe you are a housewife or a fulltime student, or a professor at the university. Do you realize that your work matters to God?

This morning I think we are going to discover together that our daily work matters more to God than we may think. He certainly has written more about the issue that we might at first imagine. Your work matters to God. What you do from the time you clock in to the time you clock out at the end of the day is of great concern to God so it should be of great concern to us.

Let begin by standing together and reading our text for the morning.

Read 1 Tim. 6:1-2

He who has ears, let him here what the Spirit says to His church.

As you can see this passage consists of only two verses, and as we study it out we are NOT surprised to discover that it only has two major points. Paul is giving counsel to slaves who have unbelieving masters and slaves who have believing masters. Let's consider the first.

I. Slaves who Work for Unbelieving Masters (1)

1. The NASB actually translates the key word *dulos* more accurately than the ESV. In the ESV we read about those who are "under the yoke as bondservants. The problem with that translation is that there really is NOT Greek word for "bondservant." It may serve to soften the blow of Paul's language for a nation like ours that still bears the wounds of the kind of slavery that once infected our land. But the word *dulos* simply means slave. Paul is talking to believers who are slaves.

2. Now it's important from the beginning here to state that the slaver that Paul was referring to in this text (and many others) was not the same thing that we think of when we reflect on the history of the 18 and 19th century English-speaking world. In first century Israel most of what was called slavery was more akin to what we would call having a job or career. In ancient

literature, it is clear that many educated and capable people were considered slaves. Often when a powerful nation conquered a people they took them to their own land and gave them specific roles to carry out in their society based on their skill, education, and ability. For example, you may remember that when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel in 586 BC he took those living in and around Jerusalem as slaves. One of them was a young man named Daniel who was given much responsibility in the land and eventually became Prime Minister.

3. Of course there were abuses in first century slavery that perhaps mirrored the horrors of more modern slavery, but many who had come to Christ found themselves either by birth or by practical need servants to various masters. In fact, it has been said there were upwards of 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire in Paul's day. To put that in perspective, the current population of Dallas Texas is only 1.3 Million. Sixty million people translates generally into about one of every four people under Roman rule. Moreover, if you happen to have lived in a more densely populated city such as Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus, the ratio would have been more like 1 in 3 people who would have been called "slaves."¹

4. So you can see that the church of Ephesus, where Timothy was serving, would have had a disproportionately large population of slaves in its membership. Many of them, however, would have looked like anything but slaves, at least as we tend to imagine them. They were artisans, bookkeepers, architects, chefs, carpenters, and house-keepers among many other things. To see them in that culture you might compare them to employed workmen rather than slaves. The difference being that they were bound or yoked to a master who provided for their needs in return for their labor.

5. In the church there would have been two kinds of people to whom Paul was writing. There were those who had believing masters and those who had unbelieving masters. IN our day we would say that there are some in our church with believing employers and some with unbelieving employers. To those with unbelieving masters (employers) Paul says (1), "Regard your masters as worthy of honor." Why? "So that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled."

- A. Now, having grown up in a country that was founded by revolution we might be tempted to attack the problem of slavery by organize protests and revolt.
- B. But this would have gone contrary to the will of God. There is nowhere in the NT where the inspired authors encourage protest or revolt.
- C. In 1 Cor. 7:21 Paul does encourage slaves to free themselves if they are presented with the opportunity. But he was not sent to demand anyone's rights. He was sent to deliver the gospel, which, upon gaining traction in society brings about fantastic transformation.

¹ Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 34

- D. Paul's concern here is NOT that believers find a happier circumstance in which to live, but that they live in such a way that reveals the glory (i.e. "name") of God and His doctrine (i.e. the gospel).
 - E. If the Christian slaves had organized a revolt, the name of God and His gospel would be blasphemed or slandered. Protecting the reputation of God and the gospel was more important to Paul than freedom.
6. So if you have an unbelieving employer, don't complain about him or argue with him. Don't go on strike against him. Rather, honor him. Here's the way Peter says it (Turn to 1 Peter. 2:18-20)
- Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.
7. If you find yourself working for a difficult and ungodly employer don't sin against him. Rather, work hard for him and seek his good. You will glorify God MORE by being faithful to ungodly and unfair employer than you would if that employer were a trusted friend who lived to make you happy. Because, as Peter will say later in 1 Pet. 3, one of these days people will ask why in the world do you put up with that guy? And when they do (3:15), "be ready to give an explanation for the hope that is in you." And remember (2:21-25), that Jesus is your example who "when he was reviled, did not revile in return but kept entrusting Himself to God who judges justly."
8. You see, your work matters to God. How you work for an unbelieving employer will either please the Lord and bring Him glory, or it may tempt him (or her) to blaspheme God's name and His Gospel. Don't work for money, or fame, or power, or influence. Work so that the glory of God will be magnified by your work and Christ-like grace on the job.
9. This is how you are to work under an unbelieving master.

II. Slaves who Work for Believing Masters: (2)

Read v. 2

1. Some believers who find themselves working for a believing employer will be tempted to take advantage of the situation and expect preferential treatment. They might try to erase the line between the one IN authority and the one under authority. After all the NT teaches that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, man and woman, slave and free. But passage that speak like that are talking about the spiritual reality that we are all "in Christ." Every one of us who believe are equally member of Christ without distinction. But in a temporal sense, the Lord

requires us to remember that for the sake of order in this life people must obey established authorities. To do otherwise is to invite chaos.

2. So how do you work for a believing boss? Serve him better than you would serve an unbelieving boss. Why? Because the one who benefits from your labor is a brother or sister in Christ. And by honoring him/her with a full day's work, and doing your best work every day, God is glorified. You see, your work matters to God.

3. Now this is the whole message of the text before us so that's the end of the sermon, right? Well, we could end here and go home early. BUT, the Lord has more to say in the NT about our work. Let's look briefly at the other passages.

III. Other Scriptures.

1. Eph. 6:5-9 (turn with me and read).

- Obey with fear and trembling
- Work with a sincere heart as you would for Christ.
- Not just when you think they may be watching
- Not to be a people-pleaser
- But as a slave of Christ
- This is what it means to do the will of God from the heart.
- Render your service with good will as to the Lord and not to men
- Remembering that the Lord has promised to reward this kind of work.

2. Col. 3:22

- Obey everything your earthly master tells you to do.
- Not only when they are watching in order to please men
- Rather, do it with sincerity of heart
- In the fear of the Lord.
- Work hard! For the Lord rather than for men
- Remember that from the Lord you will receive a reward. In other words, you will be rewarded by the Lord for your job performance.
- You are serving the Lord, Christ!
- The wrongdoer will be paid back
- There will be no partiality in this.

3. Titus 2:9-10

- Be submissive to your masters in all things
- Seek to please them
- Don't argue with them
- Don't steal from them
- But be faithful in your service to them
- So that in everything you may adorn the doctrine of God
- You may not have considered this before but it is probably not an overstatement to say that the most effective place to share the gospel is at work. You spend more time working than just about anything else you do.
- And the people at your work are probably better judges of your Christianity than we are because we only see you once a week where you can hide your true heart. But they see you every day. Your work matters to God! His glory is at stake in your world.

It is believed that Martin Luther said the following:

The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays -- not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

4. God has created us (Eph. 2:10) "for good works." Most of those works are going to take place at work... wherever you work!

5. In Martin Luther's day there was a word for the God's call of a person into ministry: Vocation. But one of the effects of the reformation was that when the primacy of the Scriptures was recovered so was the intrinsic and spiritual value of one's work – no matter what that work may be! (food-service worker, home-school mom, Teacher, president of the United States, et al).

6. And beyond that, the place where you labor for the Lord is the most obvious place for the gospel to show forth in your life. It's true, not everyone will appreciate it. You may even suffer for it. But God loves a diligent worker. He cares about your work more than you know.

In God's household people work for their employer as if their job were a divine calling into ministry.