

A jokester quipped: *'Every morning I get up and look through Forbes list of the richest people in America. If I'm not there, I go to work.'*

Some people seem to view work as a curse that sin brought into the world.

Not true! The Bible shows us people on the job before sin trespassed into paradise.

Right after God created the man and the woman he gave them work. They had to subdue the earth and rule over every living creature. (Genesis 1:28) That didn't leave much room for idleness.

Work was part of God's creation that he pronounced good (Genesis 1:31).

Because of mankind's sin God cursed the ground. God did not curse work. That's a huge difference.

To borrow a Mark Twain expression, *That is the difference between the lightning bug and lightning!*

Sin resulted in a curse on the work environment.

Before mankind's fall, work brought fulfillment; after the fall work often produced frustration.

Work is good; the problem lies with the workers. In a cursed world sinful people abuse work and workers.

Through *painful toil* and *by the sweat of [his] brow* a person makes a living in this fallen world (Genesis 3:17, 19).

We have to wrestle with the earth to provide what we need to live.

Someone said if you could distill all the wisdom of the world into one short sentence, it would be *THERE AIN'T NO FREE LUNCH.*

- God created people with an innate impulse to find satisfaction in work.

One of life's richest pleasures is the sense of fulfillment you get from a job well done. Isn't that the truth?

English Essayist John Ruskin said, *'Man's greatest reward for his toil is not what he gets for it, but what he becomes by it.'*

Work is more than something you do. It's about who you are as God created you. God designed us to be fulfilled by working.

British playwright Sir Noel Coward said, *Work is much more fun than fun.*

- Throughout history human slavery has been one of the worst and most widespread abuses of work.

If you want to understand the social environment of the Roman Empire in the New Testament era, you must deal with slavery.

Some historians say slaves comprised up to half the population of the Roman Empire in the first century.

About a third of the inhabitants of the Capital city of Rome were slaves.

People became slaves in a variety of ways:

- a. as prisoners of war
- b. as condemned people, sentenced to slavery
- c. through debt
- d. through kidnapping
- e. some were sold into slavery by their parents
- f. most were born into slavery

- Slaves performed most of the work that was done. Some professional people—physicians and teachers—were slaves.

And get this: some slaves even had their own slaves!

Household slaves practically became part of their owner's family. The parents, the children and all slaves they owned comprised the household.

When we read in the New Testament of the salvation and baptism of whole households (e.g. Acts 16:15, 1 Corinthians 1:16), slaves were probably included.

Many of the first Christians in Jerusalem, and wherever the gospel of Christ spread, were slaves.

- We may safely assume that many elders and other leaders in the New Testament churches were slaves.

In the same church slaves and their slave owners were members together.

In Christ's Church there was equality.

Paul emphasized in his letter to Timothy, as we saw last week, that there must be no favoritism or preferential treatment of anyone in the church, whether slave or free.

- It seems that this created some confusion outside the church context.

They learned how slaves and slave-owners were to relate to each other in the church fellowship.

But what about the workplace?

- The Apostle Paul had already dealt with this knotty issue of slavery for Christians. In the letter he wrote to the Ephesian church three or four years before his letter to Timothy at Ephesus he said, *Slaves, obey your earthly*

masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them, not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is a slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Paul also wrote the same thing to the church at Colossae. (Colossians 3:22-4:1; cf. Titus 2:9; Philemon)

- If you are a student of history and culture you may find this interesting.
- But maybe you're thinking, "So what? William Wilberforce has come and gone; the Civil War is history. Isn't this slavery stuff irrelevant to us today?"
- Do Paul's guidelines about Christian slaves and slave owners in first century Ephesus mean anything to us in a free society—in the American marketplace?

We don't have slaves today, so the particularities of a slave society are foreign to us.

The closest similarity we have to slave owners and slaves is employers and employees.

The basic principles for Christian slaves and slave owners are the same for Christian employees and employers today.

- In our Bible text today, the Apostle Paul tells us how Christians are to behave in a secular workplace.

6:1 *All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered.*

6:2 *Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.*

6:3 *If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,*

6:4 *he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions*

6:5 *and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.*

In 1 Timothy 6:1-5 the Apostle Paul provides three guiding principles for Christians in the marketplace.

I. RESPECT IN A SECULAR WORKPLACE (verse 1)

6:1 *All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered.*

Most Christians are employed in a secular workplace. Only a small percentage work in a Christian environment. And the Christian worker usually reports to a supervisor who is not a practicing Christian.

- Paul uses a rather graphic term for a slave in Ephesus: '*under the yoke of slavery.*' It's the picture of a beast yoked in harness to pull a cart or a plow or to thresh grain.

In the secular marketplace people viewed slaves similar to domestic animals. Their value lay in their ability to work.

When I was a student I had a summer job driving a construction truck in Canada. From the start my boss told me straight-up that I didn't matter. What mattered was keeping that truck moving and getting the optimum work out of it. If college boy couldn't do it, there were guys standing in line behind me to take my place. I loved it—best summer job I ever had.

- When the Christian faith entered the first-century secular marketplace there was a mighty clash of kingdoms. The way Christians treated one another in the community of faith was radically different from the way people related to each other in a pagan society. At least, it was supposed to be.

Paul explained that in Christ's Church, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28)

In church the slaves were valued exactly the same as the free people. They were precious, elect children of God.

In the secular workplace Christian slaves had value only if they could do work.

Even when the masters were kind to servants, there was never any notion of equality.

- This must have caused some Christian slaves to feel confused and anxious.

They had to contend with two identities; one for the kingdom of God; one for the kingdom of man.

Some of you may enjoy loving Christian fellowship in your small group tonight, and tomorrow at work you may feel as if you're in a hostile den of lions ready to pounce on you.

- What is your responsibility as a Christian if your boss is not a Christian?

How will your boss or your co-workers ever experience God's love and become attracted to Jesus Christ if you are lazy and have a sullen or judgmental attitude?

Let me suggest a paraphrase of Paul's words here in verse 1: *'When you honor your unbelieving boss by honest work, you honor God's name and authenticate the Christian truth. If you show disrespect to your boss by poor work or dishonesty, you slander God's name and the gospel.'*

That's how important your behavior on the job is to God.

Christians must not separate their weekday jobs from their Christian faith.

Dr. George Macleod founded the Iona Community--a group of workers and professionals who determined to bring Christ into the workplace. He wrote: *'I simply argue that the cross be raised again in the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves, on the town garbage heap, at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek . . . at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that's where he died. And that's what he died about. And that's where churchmen ought to be and what churchmen ought to be about.'*

If you are a Christian in truth and not just in name, God's name and the gospel are inextricably tied to you. God's reputation and that of the gospel are in your hands when you are at work.

II. LOVE IN A CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIP (verse 2)

6:2 *Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.*

The situation changes in verse 2 to the Christian slave who has a Christian master.

That solved the problem, right? Wrong!

Some educated slaves were teachers. So some elders of the church were probably slaves. And some members of the congregation were wealthy slave owners.

One of the sharpest distinctions between the secular world and the church in the first century centered in the way people viewed slaves.

I read an account of one of the British Queens who went to the Abby at noon to pray. She knelt quietly at the rail beside a peasant woman deep in prayer. Eventually the woman glanced to her side and saw her queen kneeling there. She gave a little gasp and began to move away. Her queen reached over took her arm and whispered, *Please stay. Here we are all equal.*

- What about on the job—outside the church—where your boss is a fellow-Christian?

Some Christian employers have found it necessary to dismiss Christian workers who tried to take advantage of the faith connection--they wanted special privileges and exemptions. That's awkward!

Paul gives us a timeless principle: If your boss/supervisor at work is a Christian, remember that is your brother/sister in Christ, someone who is dear to you.

You do your best for those who are dear to you.

- Now, what about the huge issue of social injustice and human equality.

It's like an elephant in the room.

Why is Paul so passive about the practice of slavery? He doesn't say a word about it being wrong.

We can say with confidence that the practice of slavery was not God's will. Slavery demeans people.

- Should Christians try to impose the church's standards on the world?

As Christians we are living in a world under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19). We live in spiritually hostile territory that is incompatible with the kingdom of God.

Christians will never make this world into what we would like it to be.

Our mandate is to rescue people from the spiritual darkness of the devil's domain and bring them into Christ's kingdom, of which the church is the most visible part.

Until Christ returns at the end of the age Christians deal with structures and practices in society that are diametrically opposed to God's will. That's life!

- Do you see anything—any structure or practice—in the world today that demeans people and is contrary to God's will?

Of course you do—human rights violations; disregard for the sanctity of human life; overt celebration of sexual practices that God declares an abomination—and there's quite a hellish smorgasbord out there.

Whether we like it or not, Paul did not urge Timothy to rally the church to overthrow the ancient, but un-Christian practice of slavery.

I'm guessing that instead of getting all bent out of shape about slavery in secular society, the Apostle Paul was overjoyed that in Christ's church people could experience the liberty, love and dignity God intended for all those he created in his likeness.

The church's priority was God's glory and the gospel. It was not their mission to try to throw off the yoke of slavery.

- So, should the church be concerned about immoral practices and structures in American Society today? Yes, definitely. We grieve and we get involved.

If the church is not the conscience of our society, then what will be?

But a church's priority is always, always to avoid reproach to the name of God and the Gospel of Christ.

III. TRUTH IN A CORRUPT CULTURE 1 Timothy 5:3-5

6:3,4a *If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing.*

We must not separate verses 1 and 2 from verses 3-5.

Paul has just explained God's will for Christian behavior in the workplace. Now he warns them to beware of those who teach differently.

- He sets out two options here: being healthy or being sick.

6:4b, 5 *He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.*

Literally, starting in verse 3 *'If anyone teaches differently (heterodidaskalei) and does not consent to healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . he is diseased with controversies and quarrels about words . . .'*

Those whose Christian faith doesn't work in their workplace are spiritually sick: They also wreak havoc in the church.

They're the ones who are behind the quarrels and slander and dissention and evil suspicion that has destroyed countless churches.

They love to use labels and argue about words.

- What is the prevailing philosophy of a materialistic marketplace? You can sum it up in just a few words: *Love things and use people to get things.*

The end of verse 5 describes people in the church who ignore Christian values. They think godliness or piety or Christian religion is "a means to financial gain."

They see no reason to live a holy life as a Christian unless it has a financial payoff for them here.

Some slaves may have heard how Christians shared good things with one another. So they thought, *Be smart. Become a Christian ; tell a sob story at church and climb aboard their gravy train.*

- I have known some people who claim to be Christians who joined a church because it's good for business.

This is actually taught in sales seminars.

They choose a church that the powerful and influential attend, hoping to meet them and make good business contacts. God is not fooled.

- The truth is Godliness is never a means to financial gain. Godliness means living an authentic Christian life.

We desperately need this truth in the church in the midst of a corrupt culture.

Does your faith work where you work?

Is it one of your priorities to make sure that the name of God and the truth of the Christian faith is not reviled because of your attitude and conduct in the marketplace?

Paul implies that these principles about faith in the workplace also affect the relationships Christians have with one another. Those who honor Christ in the workplace are the ones who encourage others and share with one another and promote unity and trust in the church (5).