

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 5 May 2019. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Christian Work Ethic

Ephesians 6:5-9

I remember a time, years ago, when the home page of a major American news network featured an article entitled “**Ten Ways Slackers Can Shine at Work.**” Basically, the article gave tips on how to be lazy at work, yet still give your boss the impression that you are being industrious. Sadly, this article reveals the work ethic of too many people in our society. Multitudes of people put in a minimal day’s work, yet expect to be rewarded for it. This is not called “being smart”: it is called defrauding. It’s called stealing.

Of course, the problem, on the other side of the coin, is that employers and managers often abuse their authority, lie to their workers, break their promises, underpay employees, or try to force them to do unethical things. The wicked, adamic sin nature has corrupted every part of man’s being; and for this reason, the workplace can be an ugly place, as the rottenness of mankind comes out under high pressure.

However, in the midst of a sea of sin, Christians should stand out in the workplace like beacons. They should stand out not only because they live holy lives, but because they are submissive to authority, and because they are the hardest-working people in the place! In **Romans 6:17-18**, Paul reminded the Christians in Rome, “***But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*** (In other words, they had believed the Gospel, and had been saved.) Paul went on to say, “***Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.***” *That*, my friends, is what makes all the difference! Christians are *free from sin*. If you have been saved, then sin is no longer your master. You now have the power to live righteously. If you are *availing* of that power, then your sanctified lifestyle *will* affect the way you do your job.

This morning, we will examine one more evidence that a Christian is living a Spirit-filled, sanctified life: and that evidence is his conduct in the workplace. The title of this message is ***The Christian Work Ethic.***

Read Ephesians 6:5-9.

I. The Christian employee’s work ethic (vv. 5-8)

As we read this passage, it is important to remember to whom Paul was writing. First of all, we know that some of people in the church of Ephesus were *slaves*. **(Read verse 5 again.)** The greater part of the Roman Empire (about one-fourth of the population) was made up of slaves. Some slaves were well-educated tutors of their master’s children, and were considered to be respected members of the household. However, most slaves were treated cruelly. Being a slave was a hard life! We also know that at least a few members of the church of Ephesus were slave *owners*, because Paul addressed masters, as well. **(Read verse 9 again.)**

Now, the church of Ephesus was certainly not the only church that had slaves in its membership role. Probably most, if not all, the churches that Paul established, had both slaves *and* slave owners. In Paul’s letter to the church of Colossae, he gave instructions to the slaves

and to the masters, just as he had done in his letter to the church of Ephesus. The book of **Philemon** was written by Paul to a Christian slaveowner named Philemon, who lived in Colossae. (The letter was about Philemon's slave, Onesimus. Onesimus had stolen from his master, and had run away to Rome; but while he was in Rome, he had crossed paths with Paul, and Paul had led him to the Lord! Paul wrote the letter to Philemon to reconcile Onesimus to his master.) In Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul reminded the Galatian Christians that in Christ, there is no difference between "***bond and free.***" Paul had to remind the Galatians of this truth, because their churches had both slaves and freemen in their ranks.

Read Colossians 3:22 – 4:1.

Read Philemon 1-21.

Read Galatians 3:26-28.

What other kind of people was in the church of Ephesus? Undoubtedly, there were some believers who, though they were not bond-slaves, were not Roman citizens, either. As non-citizens, these people had no real rights under the law. They were poor peasants, who barely eked out a living. Although they were not technically bond-slaves, they were *virtual* slaves to the Roman government, which taxed them mercilessly. Furthermore, because they had no real rights under the law, their employers could withhold wages from them, and not face any consequences for it. *Many* of the believers in the first-century churches were poor peasants. In **2 Corinthians 8:2**, Paul commended the saints in the churches of Macedonia, because out of their own "***deep poverty,***" they had given "***beyond their power***" to help their poor brethren in the churches of Judaea. By the way, the saints in Judaea were just as bad off the saints in Macedonia, if not more so. Their employers withheld their wages from them; and because they were followers of Jesus of Nazareth, no one defended them. They were really suffering!

Read James 5:1-6.

Roman society was extremely different from the free, open society in which we live. In our modern Western world, we take it for granted that the average person can receive an education, work in a career of his choosing, or even start his own business, should he so wish. As for slavery and forced labour, we cannot even fathom such a thing. We have no idea what "oppression" is! Yet, even though Paul's world was so radically different from our own, the commands that Paul gave to the Ephesian Christians still apply to us today. The Christian work ethic is the same, whether you live in a free society, or in an oppressive society, which tolerates slavery. Governments may change, and economic systems may change; but God has not changed His expectations of His children. Christ has a work ethic for His people.

First of all, Paul commands servants (*duloi*, or "bond-slaves") to "***obey***" their masters, "***with fear and trembling.***" Interestingly, Paul is using the same language that he used in **chapter 5**, where he instructed wives to "***reverence***" (literally, "fear") their husbands (**Ephesians 5:33**). Why does Paul keep talking about obeying those in authority with "***fear and trembling***"? After all, doesn't the book of **Proverbs** say that the "***fear of man bringeth a snare***"? Yes, it does say that. However, as with all Scripture, we must look at the context, and compare Scripture with Scripture, to see what God is saying. Let's look at that passage in **Proverbs**.

Read Proverbs 29:25.

The “*fear of man*” that Solomon warns us against here in **Proverbs 29:25** is *not* the kind of “*fear*” that Paul is talking about in **Ephesians 5 and 6**. Solomon is talking about the kind of “*fear of man*” that causes a person to *stop trusting God*. That is why Solomon goes on to say, “*whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.*” Fear of the Pharaoh of Egypt caused Abraham to stop trusting God. Fearing for his life, he told Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister, instead of his wife; and his lie got him into big trouble. Fear of the Sanhedrin caused Peter to deny that he knew the Lord. Peter fell into a “*snare,*” because he stopped fearing and trusting God. That kind of “*fear of man*” is not godly fear. That is a fear that causes us to sin.

In contrast, the fear that Paul is talking about here in **Ephesians 6** is *godly reverence*. It is a fear that is ultimately directed toward God. As Christians, we *should* fear and tremble at the thought of disobeying or disrespecting our boss: yet, it is not really our *boss* whom we fear. It is *God* whom we fear. How so? Because it is *God* who gave your employer his authority. Of course, in our modern world, we are not *slaves* to our employers, as some of the Ephesian Christians were. We have the freedom to leave a job should we so choose, and to work somewhere else. However, the fact that you have that freedom doesn’t change the fact that as long as you are in your boss’s employ, you are to respect and obey him (as long as he is not commanding you to disobey God). When you “signed the dotted line” to begin employment at your workplace, you were agreeing to place yourself under the authority of your boss; and whether your boss realises it or not, *he* is subject to *Christ*. Christ is *his* authority. You are subject to your boss, and your boss is subject to Christ. In working for your employer, you are actually working for Christ; and Christ is watching your performance very closely!

So, how does this play out in your daily life? Well, for one thing, regardless of whether your employer is as kind as he should be, you should fear rebelling against his authority. Why? Because you fear *him*? No, because you fear God. Would you speak disrespectfully to the Lord Jesus if He were here in the flesh? Then you’d better not “tell off” your boss, or badmouth him to other employees, or disregard his instructions. If you make an appeal to him, it should be done with respect, as though you were speaking to the Lord.

Fear of man leads people to sin, or to shrink from their duty. Fear of God, on the other hand, leads men to do their duty to the absolute best of their ability, and to stand for right even when there are consequences for doing so. For example, **Joseph** did his very best work for Potiphar. Even though he had been betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave, he did not allow himself to be bitter. He obeyed his master as though he were working for Jehovah Himself. It was only when Potiphar’s wife ordered him to commit adultery with her that he disobeyed his human authority. He would not yield to her command, even though he knew that it might cost him his life. He did what was right; and God exalted him in His time.

Now, not only does Paul instruct us to “*obey*” our masters with “*fear and trembling*”: he also instructs us to obey them “*in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.*” That word “*singleness*” means “simplicity,” or “sincerity.” It means that you are not divided in your attention to your duty, or in your motive in service. It means that you have only *one* aim: and that aim is to do your job as though you were doing it for Christ Himself.

In everything we do in life, we should do that thing as unto Christ. We should have a “single” eye and a “single” heart toward Him.

Read Matthew 6:22-24.

The word “*single*” in **verse 22** comes from the Greek word *haplous*. As I mentioned a minute ago, this word can also be translated as “sincere.” You know, I’m afraid that we often misuse the word “sincere.” When people use the word “sincere,” they often use it as an excuse for substandard work. For example, many people would say, “Well, maybe I didn’t do the best job that I could have done; but I’m sincere. I mean well.” (Many Christians think this way about their service to the Lord. For example, many Christians say, “Well, I know that I skip church now and then; but I’m sincere. I’m worshipping God in my heart.”) My friend, a divided service (whether to God, or to man) cannot be called “sincere.” Sincere means “single.” It means “undivided.” Not doing your job *to the absolute best of your ability*, with undivided service to Jesus Christ, is sin. In every task you do, you are to do it “**as unto Christ.**” If you do your job half-baked, or with murmuring and complaining against your earthly master, the Lord is not pleased.

Most of us know about **William Carey**, who was a poor English cobbler who lived in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s. In his teen years, he received Christ as His Saviour; and he was baptised into the membership of a Baptist church. God soon gave him a burden for carrying the Gospel to heathen lands. In 1792, he wrote a small booklet called “*An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen.*” He wrote many other books and tracts about the need of missions; and he preached about it in pulpits all around England. Within a generation, his call to foreign missions had resulted in the formation of countless missionary societies.

Carey was blessed with natural brilliance and determination. He taught himself Greek, Latin, French, and Dutch, without any formal training. He had the courage to start the first missionary society ever (The Baptist Missionary Society) in a day when such an idea was mocked and scorned. He and his family sailed to India as missionaries in 1793. During his 41 years of missionary service in India, he taught himself many Indian languages. He developed written languages for, and translated the entire Bible into, six languages; and he wrote grammars, lexicons, and dictionaries for those languages. Yet, despite all this, he was raked over the coals by most of the professing Christian world. They saw him as an upstart and a radical. At first, even many Baptist brethren criticised his efforts.

However, William Carey was not daunted. He was a man of great faith. A famous motto of his was “**Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God.**” He also was an incredibly industrious, hard-working man. However, the thing that made his work ethic great was his *motivation* for his work. Everything that Carey did, he did it out of love and zeal for the Lord. Someone once asked Carey in a mocking way, “What is *your* business?” (This person knew very well that he was a cobbler by trade.) However, Carey was not ashamed. His answer was: “My business is serving the Lord; and I make shoes to pay my expenses.”

Can *you* say that “My business is to serve the Lord, but I work at my job in order to pay my expenses”? It certainly isn’t wrong to seek higher, better-paying employment—as long as you keep in mind that Jesus Christ is your real Employer, and that you are working for *Him*. The

money that you are earning doesn't really come from your human employer; it comes from your *heavenly* Master, Jesus Christ. Whether you have the brilliance of William Carey, or you are just an average Joe with average abilities, God views your labour as sacred. God wants you to work to the absolute best of your ability, because you are serving *Him*.

When a believer has this biblical view of work, he sees a holy dignity in everything he does! A Spirit-filled Christian does not allow himself to become bitter because his employer undervalues his work. A Spirit-filled Christian isn't concerned if other people smirk at him because he doesn't have a high-paying career. A Spirit-filled Christian performs his job as though it is the most important job in the world—because he knows that God is his Employer!

How else should Christians do their work? Let's look again. **(Read Ephesians 6:6 again.)** What does Paul mean when he says that we should do our service "*not with eyeservice*"? He's saying that we shouldn't work hard only because our boss is watching us. That's the kind of service that many people in our world do, because God is not in their thoughts. "After all," they think, "If I can get away with not working so hard, what's the harm in it?" Christians should have a totally different attitude!

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12.

Read Romans 12:10-11.

Our world is full of people who have no desire to work, and who expect others to pay their tab through life. Our world is full of *slothful* workers, who work only when the boss is around. Our world is also full of lying, flattering, duplicitous workers, who use people in order to get ahead. Brethren, no child of God should be guilty of these things! God's people should be known for working hard all the time, with a sincere respect and submission to authority.

Now, there is a promise that God gives to those who serve their earthly masters with a Christ-like attitude. Let's read **verse 8** again. **(Read Ephesians 6:8 again.)** Paul says that Christians who do the will of God from the heart will receive **a reward** from the Lord. What is that reward? Well, for one thing, God promises to meet all our earthly needs. He promises to give us the spiritual fruit of "*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance* (self-control)." (These are rewards that no money on earth can buy!) God also promises us rewards when we get to heaven. Your labours for the Lord (whether they be done in the church, in the home, or in the workplace) are all being recorded in God's books. Just as unsaved people are treasuring up wrath against the Day of Judgment, saved people are treasuring up rewards—according to what they do for the Lord. Every time you do your job heartily, as unto the Lord, it is recorded in His book. And what will you do with those rewards? **Revelation 4:11** says that we will all cast out crowns at Jesus' feet and say, "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*"

Think about that. The purpose of the rewards we receive will be to reflect glory back to *Christ*. Christian, if you don't have many rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, then you will have little to give back to Christ as a token of your love for Him. Is *that* what the record will show at the Judgment Seat? Will your record show that you worked hard—but not "*as*

unto the Lord”? Will the books show that you worked for the pride and glory of your career, or for the acquisition of more money, to get more things for *yourself*? I pray not!

Now, there’s something else I want you to notice. At the end of **verse 8**, Paul says that we will receive reward from the Lord *“whether we be bond or free.”* In other words, these truths apply in *any* work relationship. Many people in Paul’s audience were in the *“bond”* category. They were slaves—someone else’s property. Yet, Paul didn’t instruct them to rise up in revolution against their masters. Instead, Paul instructed them to do their work as though they were doing it for Christ; and he assured them that they would be rewarded for it in heaven. Likewise, those who were *“free”* (not slaves) were instructed to work with the same diligence. That would be *us*, folks! We are not slaves: we are freemen. Yet, we *do* have *“masters according to the flesh.”* We have employers. Your employers don’t own you; but you *do* have a contract with them. You have agreed to give them a full and fair day’s work. Should your contract be a simple verbal agreement, don’t take advantage of the person who is paying you. Show up on time, and do your best. Give it all you’ve got: and do it as unto Christ!

Do you realise what a huge difference it would make if everyone on earth heeded God’s Word? There would never be strikes or labour uprisings. Bloody communist revolutions would never have happened if the Word of God had been heeded by both master and worker. Many honest historians have pointed out that England would have had a bloody revolution just like that of France in the 1790’s, or like other European nations in the mid 1800’s, had it not been for the preaching of John Wesley, and other great preachers at that time. During the Industrial Revolution, the common people of England were just as poverty-stricken and oppressed as people in other European nations were. The poor, embittered, despairing, toil-crushed, working classes could easily have turned to violence against the capitalists, had their hearts not been transformed by the Gospel message of the revival preachers. Multitudes of people were changed from the inside out by the Gospel; and instead of rising up against their masters in rebellion, they gave them the best work that they could give. America’s 28th president, **Woodrow Wilson**, said this about John Wesley: *“There is a deep fascination in this mystery of what one man may do to change the face of his age. John Wesley....planned no reform, premeditated no revivification of society; his was simply the work of.....conviction.”*

It was the work of *God*, and not of John Wesley, that changed so many people in Wesley’s day. Wesley didn’t preach a worldly “social justice” gospel: he preached the Gospel of salvation from the penalty and power of sin, through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When John Wesley preached to the embittered, angry, cynical coal miners, there were tears of repentance streaming down their blackened faces by the time he was done. Everywhere he went, lives were changed, as people turned their hearts over to Christ.

We who know Christ should stand out radically from the world in our attitude toward our work and our employers. Christian, are you making a difference in your godly conduct?

II. The Christian employer’s work ethic (v. 9)

(Read verse 9 again.) Perhaps this will be a new revelation to some of you; but do you realise that there is no place in the Bible where God specifically condemns slavery? For example, in Old Testament Israel, there were indentured servants (people who served a master in order to pay off a debt to him). God commanded masters to be kind and fair to their

Hebrew servants, and to free them after seven years of service. He commanded masters to be kind to foreign servants, as well. However, slavery was never specifically condemned. Now, critics of the Bible love to point out this fact. They love to accuse the Bible of promoting slavery. However, what they fail to see is that in order for slavery to be abolished, there had to be a change of heart. **Hearts that have been changed by God’s love and forgiveness don’t need a prohibition of slavery.** In the first three centuries after Christ, the institution of slavery was abandoned by most Christian slave-owners—or, at least, radically reformed. There was no “movement” to change it: it just happened. Christian masters, realising that God is no respecter of persons, voluntarily freed their slaves. Even if their slaves did not share their Christian faith, they *still* freed them. Oftentimes their slaves gladly stayed in their service, and received wages from their masters, whereas before they had received no wages.

In England, slavery was outlawed in 1830—mostly through the influence of the Whitefield and Wesley revivals. By the way, it was because of the efforts of **William Wilberforce**, who was a fervent Christian, and a member of the Plymouth Brethren (which is basically Baptist in doctrine) that slavery was finally banished. The teachings of the Bible *do* make a difference in society, folks! God doesn’t have to call for an end of slavery; all He has to do is free men from the slavery of sin. With changed hearts and renewed minds, born-again Christians are able to have an effect on society simply by preaching the Gospel, and living holy lives.

We don’t live in the days of slavery anymore; but the same Christ-like attitude that led to the end of slavery should motivate God’s children as they carry out their functions in the workplace. Just as Christian slaves (or hired workers) are to give their masters their best service, **so Christian masters are to be kind and fair to their employees.** This doesn’t mean that they let their employees defraud them, or do a sub-standard job, or take advantage of them. It simply means that they treat their employees with fairness and respect. A Christian boss doesn’t look at workers as “hands” or “bodies”; he looks at them as souls for whom Christ died, and whom they should thus treat with kindness. A Christian manager knows that his heavenly Master is recording everything he does and says to his workers.

Should you be in a position of authority (or should you ever be promoted to a position of authority), remember that God is watching you. You should be known as the boss who enforces policy, yet who makes sure that employees are treated with respect and consideration. You should be known as the manager who doesn’t yell at and threaten his workers, nor treat them like “little people.” (This is what Paul calls **“respect of persons.”**) You should also be known as the manager who isn’t afraid to talk about his faith in Christ when the opportunity arises. Of course, having this kind of Christ-like character may cost you. If you perform your manager’s role with integrity, your superiors may threaten to dismiss *you*, because you are a “square peg in a round hole” (because you are not underhanded and dishonest, as they are). (I personally know godly Christians who have lost a management job because of their integrity!) However, just as God promised to reward servants who serve their masters with singleness of heart, He also promises to reward masters who do *their* job **“without respect of persons.”** Should you be a “master” (or if you ever become one), do you work as unto the Lord!

Conclusion: Perhaps the Lord has spoken to you about your work ethic. Perhaps there are young people who need to resolve in their hearts to finish the jobs and chores that their parents give them, and to do their very best in every task, as though they were doing it for Christ. Perhaps there are some of you adults who work hard every day; yet, you are not doing your work with the right motivation (**“as unto the**

Lord”). Perhaps you find it easy to murmur and complain against your boss. Perhaps you are motivated by fear of man, and not fear of God. Should the Lord be speaking to you, now is the time to get it right!

Before I close, I would like to address those who might not be saved. Perhaps you are a hard, dependable worker: and if so, that is a good thing. However, you need to realise that being a good worker can't save you from hell; only *Christ* can save you. If you have been depending on your own goodness to get you to heaven, you are lost. You *must* trust in the work that Christ did for you on the cross, and receive it as a gift. **(See Ephesians 2:8-9.)** If you have not repented and believed on Jesus, please do so today!