

Working For His Glory Eph. 6:5-9

When I say the word “work” or “job” a variety of feelings come bubbling up from inside. A recent survey showed that only 51% of Americans are happy with their jobs—which means that 49% are not—but whether they like their work or not, Americans do a lot of it. Gallup report in 2014 found that the average American works 47 hours a week—considerably more than the rest of the world. According to the International Labor Organization “Americans work 137 more hours per year than Japanese workers, 260 more hours per year than British workers, and 499 more hours per year than French workers.” To add to that, Americans on average receive the least amount of paid vacation compared to other countries and a survey by glassdoor revealed that Americans use only 54% of their allotted vacation time each year. There is no way around it—work is a huge part of American life and culture. And because we spend so much of our time working it’s worth thinking in-depth about it to make sure we’re working in a way that pleases God. The Bible has a lot to say about work. God cares a lot of how you work, you’re understanding of why you work. And so whether you are a doctor or a stay at home mom a teacher or a electrician, whether you love what you do or hate what you do, there’s a word her for us about how to work for God’s glory and leverage our work for the Gospel. **Pray.**

“Slaves obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling...” Now right out of the gate we need to make a few clarifications here. When we here the words slaves and masters, we immediately tend to think of the brutal African slave trade of the the American South in the 1800s. This is not at all what Paul is talking about. In fact, many of your translations translate it servant or bondservant to communicate that Paul is talking about something similar to indentured servanthood. It was where someone had a debt they couldn’t pay and essentially sold themselves to the person they owed until they paid off their debt. So it wasn’t race based and it most cases it wasn’t permanent. Nevertheless, it wasn’t great either—some masters or bosses were harsh and unfair—some weren’t. And so Paul speaks into this arrangement as sort of a less than ideal often rough employer-employee relationship. And while we don’t have an exact parallel to this today, some of you are like, “This sounds like my job” But regardless, this passage has a lot to teach us about how the Gospel shapes our work. And to set the table for this conversation we need to go back to the very beginning in Genesis.

And in Genesis what we see is that God, from 1:1 is described as a worker. He’s a craftsman. And he creates the world from nothing and designs all sorts of birds and plants and fish and stars with all different colors and sizes and shapes and the crown of his creative process is man who he makes in his own image. He’s designed man to reflect God and extend His reign on earth. And his first command to them is a command to work. In **Gen. 1:28 “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.”** So he calls them to the work of parenting and the work of cultivating the garden he had placed them in. And Gen. 2:15 says clearly, **“So the LORD God took man and put him the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”** Notice God created a Garden that needed cultivation and maintenance and he designed Adam and Eve to do that work. Which means that from the very beginning, before any sin or brokenness came into the world, God created work as a good thing. God gave work to man as a good thing that allows us to exercise our gifts and energies and in so doing reflect the working God that we serve. Work is in our nature...love making thing and building things and working to some goal and seeing things grow and improve because of our effort. I mean even on vacation we like to go hard. (Building huge sand castle on beach)

We want to exert ourselves we want to do something well—almost no one is really bored and really happy. We want to do something we want to work—the problem is not work, it's what happened to work in the fall. When sin entered the world everything changed and the work that was once life-giving in Gen. 3:17 is now called “painful toil”—the woman's painful toil in childbirth the man's pain as he works the ground which will now have thorns and thistles...And it's in the aftermath of this brokenness that each one of us labors and it's because of sin inside of us that each one of us fights either one of two tendencies when it comes to work.

You hate work and try to do as little of it as possible. You live for the weekend. If this is you, work is a necessary evil that makes leisure and living possible, and your biggest dream would be to retire early and master hobbies. On the other side of the spectrum we have folks who worship their work. Their job—be it the position they have or the amount of money they make—is what gives them their sense of worth. It defines who they are. Climbing the ladder and acquiring wealth allows them to feel powerful, significant, and often comes with a salary that offers a lifestyle many others can't afford. These folks see work as the source of their abundant life. And both approaches to work run contrary to what we see laid out in Scripture. And so I want us to step into this text and see what God has to say about how we should approach work and understand how the gospel empowers us to do that.

Paul says servants are to, “obey with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by way of eye service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.” (Eph. 6:5-7)

Two big ideas here that should shape the way we work. Number one is that our work is done ultimately for the Lord, not man. You see mentioned in vs 5 where we obey “as [we] would Christ”, again in vs 6 “as servants of Christ doing the will of God”, and then it's spelled out in vs. 7 we work as those “rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.” Col. 3:23 applies this to all work not just paid work, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” And this is so important to understand because it's what makes our work valuable—even if it seems small and insignificant to the world. The value of our work is not wrapped up in the specifics of what we do but in the person we do it for—and it's not our boss. It's God. Martin Luther “If you ask an insignificant maid-servant why she scours a dish or milks the cow, she can say: I know that the thing I do pleases God, for I have God's Word and commandment...God does not look at the insignificance of the acts but at the heart that serves Him in such little things...What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God.” So don't miss this...Whether you're a factory worker, or an executive, a stay at home mom or a janitor, your work is valuable not because of the money you make for doing it but because of the one man audience you do it for and the glory he receives from it.

This is how Jesus spoke about his work...people ask all the time how can I glorify God look here, Jn. 17:4 “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” Like if you were asking me one way to glorify God I might ask you, what do you do for a living? And then I'd say do that and do it really well. Again Luther was once approached by a working man who wanted to know how he could serve the Lord. Luther asked him, “What is your work now?” The man replied, “I'm a shoemaker.” Luther replied, “Then make a good shoe and sell it at a fair price.” Which brings us to the second big idea here which flows from the first.

If our work is ultimately for God, then our work should be excellent. Look at how Paul emphasizes the quality of our work, “sincere heart”, “from the heart”, “service with a good will” as one who is serving God not man.

Because our work is for God there is no room for Christians to be content with being mediocre at their jobs. It's not acceptable to just do enough to by. If ultimately serving God in our work, then we should be doing it as well as we possibly can. Imagine if Jesus was coming over for dinner. Like, would you just throw that one together? You're careful and make sure everything is excellent. Rehearse prayer? Like you made this recipe 1000 times...It's not *what* I'm making but *who* I'm making it for. **Is it not a shame then that in our culture people talk about a "Christian" sports team or a "Christian movie" where subtly "Christian" communicates a lower standard? God is worthy of excellence!!** One of the best things some of you could do to honor God from 9—5 is to get better at what you do.

You say well my boss is a jerk, he doesn't deserve quality work. And he may not, but God does. And that's why Paul says in vs. 6 don't work **"by way of eye service as people pleasers"** don't just work hard when your boss is watching or because people will see, work hard when no one is watching because God sees and he is worthy! And in the work he's given us we're trying to serve him and do His will. Which by the way means that the rest of God's will expressed in Scripture should be present in the workplace as well. Our words are filled with grace. Not gossip at the water cooler. Completely transparent about the work we did or failed to do. We're forgiving others and extending mercy when needed. We're sacrificing for our co-workers even if it may not benefit us. For some of your co-workers you're the closest thing to Jesus they may ever see!

That's why this is so important—your Christlike character and quality work can help you win a hearing for the Gospel—that's one of the primary reasons God has put you in your workplace. And we damage our witness with shoddy work and a questionable conduct. I mean the guy who comes in late, clocks our early and spends most of his day on Facebook, and always complains, are you going to take him seriously when he tries to tell you about how you should be living your life? No. The quality of our work gives us a platform to speak about the quality of our God. Are you doing everything you can to offer a quality of work that is worthy of being associated with name of Jesus? Because that's what you're called to.

He's called you to be faithful to represent him in your job, he's promised to reward you when you are. Vs. 8 says **"knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord whether he is slave or free."** We're not told the exact nature of the reward. We know it's not a health or wealth in this life—reality is that in Scripture when folks starting following Jesus their circumstances got worse not better. But in light of that God wants us to know that when we stand before him, He will reward us for our work done in service to Him. Now we need to be clear here, that the reward that is mentioned here is not salvation. We're saved by faith alone in Christ's work on our behalf—the only thing we contribute to our salvation is the sin from which we need to be redeemed. And so we're saved by grace alone and the rewards God promises us for our work are in addition to salvation...and this is a promise for everyone. The text says for slaves and free....free people here represent by the masters which he turn to next...

And he addresses them with a statement that was unheard of in the ancient world. A shocking word to masters. He says, **"Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening,"** Everything I just said about slaves working for God with a sincere heart...that applies to you as well. This is where if you thought for one second that Paul was endorsing anything like the African slave trade it's clear that he's not. He's telling Masters "as they are to submit to Christ in the way they work for you, you are to be equally as submitted to Christ in the way that you interact with them. Not appearing to be sincere when no one is looking but genuinely Christ-like in the way you interact with them."

Paul is pushing back against a dangerous temptation for those in power particularly employers—bosses—and it's the idea that if someone works for you—you pay them—then you can treat them however you want—threaten them, demeaning them. Like there is no where in the Bible where you're exempt from being Christlike by nature of your position.

Case in point—Jesus Christ—king of the world, worshipped by angels, sinless, infinite glory—joyfully washes peoples feet. Which means there is no position you can occupy where you're obligated to treat others with love and respect. The Fortune 500 billionaire is called by God to treat the janitor that takes out his trash in a way that is utterly Christ-like. Why? Look it gets better. knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him." Look at word play here, he's talking to masters and he's saying that there is a capital M master that is over both of them. Don't miss the irony here. The reason masters must treat their slaves with equity and dignity is because at the end of the day both of them are slaves. Both are slaves to a capital M Master—there is no partiality with him.

What does that mean? That means God's not going to make some exceptions for you because of your position. You may be at the top of your field, have impressive networks and connections, wear nice suits and be a member of the country club and that's fine...but listen, God's not impressed...and when you stand before Him there will be no one pulling strings for you. The prince and the Pauper will be on level ground.

So employers in this room, we have to ask does the way you interact with your employees reflect this? Do you treat them with love and respect? I'm not saying you tolerate bad work, I'm saying when the conversation comes to let someone go are you gentle? Do you talk to them as someone who Christ died for? Do you value them for anything more than the bottom line? If I asked your employees, "Does _____ value you beyond how much money you make them?"—what would they say? Is there any difference between you and an unbelieving boss? There should be. What does that look like? Could you show unique generosity—taking less profit in order to offer a bonus or vacation? Could show patience in developing someone and not canning them immediately if they mess up. Are you paying fair wages? Are you taking a stand against any injustice in the work place? Are displaying Christ? I love this example from Tim Keller who tells about talking with a lady about why she had come to his church, she said "She worked for a company in Manhattan, and not long after starting there she made a big mistake that she thought would cost her the job, but her boss went to his superior and took complete responsibility for what she had done. As a result, he lost some of his reputation and ability to maneuver within the organization. She was amazed at what he had done and went to thank him. She told him that she had often seen supervisors take credit for what she had accomplished, but she had never seen a supervisor take the blame for something she had done wrong. She wanted to know what made him different. He was very modest and deflected her questions, but she was insistent. Finally, he told her, 'I am a Christian. That means among other things that God accepts me because Jesus Christ took the blame for things that I have done wrong. He did that on the cross. That is why I have the desire and sometimes the ability to take the blame for others.'" She stared at him for a moment and asked, "Where do you go to church?"

And I love this example because it shows how the Gospel transforms our view of work. You see if this guy's identity in life had been wrapped up in his occupation he would have never done that. If climbing the corporate ladder and achieving professional success is what gave him his sense of worth and purpose, he wouldn't have given that a second thought. But his mindset was transformed by the idea that Jesus took the blame for him. Why? Because God wanted to be with him and was willing to crush his Son in order to make it happen.

God saw us in our sin and for some reason by sheer grace set his affection and love on us, you say how much love—Rom 5:10 says that while we were his enemies he died for us. Like we didn't want him. But he wanted us. And he sacrificed his Son to have us. In fact Eph. 2 says that God has a glorious inheritance and it's redeemed sinners. If you're a believer in this room, when you look into the mirror, you are looking at the personal hand picked inheritance of the God of the universe...

and when you let that soak in, you're free from asking your job to give you what God already has. When you understand that your identity is wrapped up in Christ's work then you can rest from constantly having to find it in yours. And what's amazing about this is the rest we receive from not having to find our identity in our work actually motivates us to work. When we understand that the Lord has strategically placed you on the field and "God's Inheritance" is stamped on the back of your jersey, it makes you want to play really well. The Gospel that keeps you from putting your identity in work is the same Gospel that motivates excellent work. I love this quote from John Newton, "If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets of its meanest village, it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger; for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will, and with equal joy they would lift a Lazarus in his rags to Abraham's bosom, or be a chariot of fire to carry an Elijah home." What they're doing doesn't define how much effort they put into it. Who they're doing it for is what motivates them to do their work and who they're doing it for keeps them from finding their value in the specific work they've been assigned...Can you say the same?

Questions: Have you found identity in work? (Appeal to unbeliever!)

Are you slack in your work? Bare minimum to get by? Is the quality of your work worthy of being associated with God's name?

Are we reflecting Christ's character in the way we interact with others at work? Are we building relationships and strategically leveraging those for the sake of the Gospel?

Might it be said of us that we glorified God by doing the work He gave us to do.