

MBC - 2/18/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"God Made You to Work"
Ephesians 6:5-9

I want us to see our passage in its context, so let's begin by reading—

- Ephesians 5:15-21 ¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Paul goes on to show what a Spirit-filled walk looks like for husbands and wives, and for children and parents. And then for Christians who were slaves, and Christians who were slave-owners. Let's read it—

- Ephesians 6:5-9 ⁵Bondservants - *and that means "slaves,"* obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as *slaves* of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a *slave* or is free. ⁹Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

(Pray)

From the time I was a baby Christian, I heard this passage explained as talking about Christian employees and Christian employers: In his commentary, John MacArthur entitles this section, "Spirit-filled labor relations!" Well we just read it with our own eyes, it's talking about *slavery* - human slaves and their masters who owned them, not you and your boss at MacDonald's.

So the first thing I want to say about this passage is that in the strictest sense, it is not talking about *any* of us here. We interpret the Scriptures by first asking, "What did it mean to the original readers?" And they understood what Paul was talking about. Slavery was a part of daily life in the Roman Empire. It's possible that there were more slaves than free men and women. But slavery in that day was very different than the horrible, inhuman, race-based slavery that we had in this country up until the Civil War. I preached two messages on slavery a few years ago, and Mikki put them on our website and on our phone app - I would encourage you to read those messages to get more background on slavery and the Bible.

Even though the slavery in the Roman Empire wasn't the same thing as slavery in this country, it was still one person owning another person, and that's bad. The question always comes up, "Why didn't Paul just condemn slavery and pronounce all slaves, free?" I.e., He could have given the original Emancipation Proclamation. You can read my explanation in those messages, but the short answer is that slavery was so deeply rooted in everyday life, that to just say "It's over," would have resulted in Christians and Christianity being seen as rebels who were anti-Roman, anti-society. But what Paul did was to tell Christian slaves and Christian slaveowners how to live like Christians within this bad institution. And the overarching message is that you can be a Christian and express the life of Christ in you in even the worst situations! Isn't that true?

So when we read this passage, on the level of *interpretation*, it has nothing to do with you and me, but once we understand the interpretation, we can read it for its *application*, and it *does* very much apply to the work that God has called each of us to do.

And this passage is so clear and understandable that I'm not going to go through it word-by-word this morning, instead, I want to step back and see what the Scriptures about *work*.

* * *

Whoever you are, God made you to work. And the work you do has divine dignity and importance because God wants to display His glory through the work you do. And I want you to understand that when I say "work" I don't just mean a job that you get paid for, I mean studying if you are a student; I mean housework if you're a stay-at-home mom; I mean volunteer work if you are retired. Everyone has work to do. And what you do and how you do it matters very much to God.

And if you don't work, you just kinda . . . play . . . we'll get to you too.

And I'm going to be quoting some of the English Puritans because they had a lot to say about Christians and work. About 100 years ago, a man named Max Weber wrote a book entitled "*The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*." He said that the Puritan's ethic of hard work, integrity, and saving money laid the foundation for Western Society. And it was tied to their belief in God.

- On the flip side, a Harvard professor recently wrote a book called, "*The Atheist Sloth Ethic, Why Europeans Don't Believe in Work*." He says that there is a direct relationship between the atheism of Europeans and their dislike of work.

Some of you remember Dan Vanderbijl, a missionary to Muslims in Marseilles, France, telling us that the French live for their holidays and vacations. The French work about 35% less than we do. The average European worker gets 400 more hours of vacation time per year than Americans.

- And it's interesting that church attendance in America is more than double that of Europe. 50% of Europeans are atheists. This prof says there is a direct correlation between work ethic and belief in God.

Work is a *God* thing. And work is a *good* thing. I want you to see why—

I. What is our work?

A. A place to glorify God.

- EPH 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Paul says here that God saved you for good works—not *by* good works—but *for* good works. You are God's workmanship, Gk., *poie_ma*, from which we get our word "poem." If you are a Christian, you are God's work of art, and He wants to show off His Son through the fruit of your life, which He has already pre-planned for you.

So what are they, and where will you and I do these Christ-exalting good works?

Are you ready? *Mostly, at our jobs.* Plumbing, teaching, building, farming, working on computers, working in your business, working as a stay-at-home mom, working as a student.

- Look at v.10 again—Paul says that we “walk” in these good works. This is the word Paul uses throughout this letter to mean the everyday, ordinary stuff that occupies most of our time. For most of us, on a pie-chart of our lives, *work* would be the biggest slice, right?

So get this: Your work is probably the place where God intends for you to display most of the good works He designed for you. Isn't that something? Remember what Paul said in—

- 1 Cor.10:31 says that whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it to the glory of God—all things are meant for His glory—the whole pie is for His glory. If work takes up most of your time, then it's the greatest opportunity to bring God glory. And Paul says, God prepared your job before time began for this purpose.
- Matthew Campbell emailed me this week and he wanted a good hymn that he and a fellow believer could sing during their 12 hour shifts at an oil refinery! That's the right idea.

Your occupation is not just a necessary evil, something you hold your nose and put up with just to get to something else. It's the place God has put you to serve Him and bring Him glory—for 40+ hours a week. That mindset can transform your work into *worship*.

****Banish the sacred/secular!***

We need to get rid of this idea that life is divided into spiritual stuff and secular stuff. “Work is secular, but going to Bible study after work is spiritual.” No! Remember, the whole pie belongs to God, and He wants glorify from every slice. If that's true, then your job is just as much a spiritual thing as your Bible study.

- You say, “But I have a secular job, and you get to have a spiritual job—you work at the church.”

You have no idea what it's like to work with Nikky . . .

This sacred/secular division goes back to medieval Roman Catholicism. If you wanted to be spiritual, you had to pull out of the world and go to a monastery. Listen to this quote from Eusebius in the third century:

- “Two ways of life were given by the law of Christ to His church. The one is wholly and permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone . . . such then is the perfect form of the Christian life. And the other, more humble, more human, permits men to . . . have minds for farming, for trade, and the other more secular interests as well as for religion . . . and a kind of secondary grade of spirituality is attributed to them.”

Well that's really dumb. It sure doesn't come from the Bible. And when the Reformers began to re-study Scripture, they came to a completely different conclusion about work. Luther said this:

- “It is pure invention that popes, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the ‘spiritual estate’ while princes . . . artisans and farmers are the ‘temporal estate.’”

- William Tyndale said that in terms of pleasing God, “There is no difference between washing dishes and preaching the Word of God.”

Don’t ever say, “Oh, I need to quit my worldly job and get a Christian job.” Stay there and make it a Christian job!

- In Lk.3, when some Roman soldiers came down to the Jordan to be baptized, they asked John what repentance looked like for them - and Roman soldiers were brutal, rapacious men, but John didn’t tell them to find another job. He said “Don’t take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.” i.e., Stay there and be a godly Roman soldier!
- The tax-collectors asked John the same question. They were the bottom feeders of that society. What did John tell them? “Keep doing what you’re doing, but don’t rip people off.”

God wants His people to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world, so He sprinkles them into all sorts of occupations so that world can see how Jesus would build houses, teach school, do taxes, be an Uber-driver! What kind of lawyer would Jesus be? (I’m joking!)

Work is a place to glorify God, and work is—

B. A stewardship from God.

Work began in the Garden of Eden -

- Genesis 1:26-28 ²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man 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.” ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸And 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.”

Look at v.26: God made man and woman in His own image. We are to reflect Him. So how are we like God? What is the very next thing He says? “Let them have *dominion* over the fish, over the birds, over every living thing.” The image of God is expressed in us when we take care of God’s creation. We were created to be His *co-rulers*.

We are God’s gardenkeepers. And He says to us, “Work this place. Get it to produce. Pull the weeds, harvest the crops, keep the books on the business.” The Heb. word for subdue is “*kabash*”—you’ve heard the expression, “to put the *kabash* on it,” means to stop something or bring it into subjection. God created us His authority over all the rest of creation, to oversee it and make it fruitful.

- Years ago, Albertson’s supermarkets had a commercial with a big guy surrounded by mounds of vegetables singing, “It’s Joe Albertson’s supermarket, but the produce department is mine!” He was a happy guy. He had his part in making Albertson’s markets successful. His turf. That’s what I’m talking about. This is your Father’s world, but He’s given you a piece of it to oversee—to subdue and reflect His lordship in the way you care for it.

Streets and highways need to be maintained; houses need to be built, and painted and cleaned; our kids need to be taught; papers need to be filed, numbers need to be crunched. We need banks and shops and restaurants, police officers and soldiers and insurance sales-people, and on and on—all to keep God’s world running. If it needs to be done, you can do it to His glory, as a steward of His creation. And that means that your job has dignity.

I love the way John Piper put it: **“Your work is to take what God has made and shape it and use it to make Him look great.”**

- *Now that brings up a good question: “What if I’m doing a job that really doesn’t help this world or the people in it? What if what I do isn’t good for people’s health? What if it’s immoral or unethical?”

Then find another job. If it harms people, or it harms God’s creation, it shouldn’t be done and it obscures the truth about God and His glory. Find another job. Life’s too short. Don’t waste it at a God-dishonoring job.

But don’t misapply what I just said. Don’t say, “I work with mean people, and unbelievers. That couldn’t honor God.” Oh no, the opposite is true. God needs His people to be light in the darkness. Stay there and be that light.

Work is a place to bring God glory, it is a stewardship from God and it is—

C. A calling of God on our lives.

The Corinthians asked Paul a good question: “Paul, now that we are Christians, should we make some changes: should we dump our unsaved spouses for Christians? If we are single, should we get married? If we are married, should we get single? Do we need to look for new jobs? I mean if we really want to serve Christ, what do we do?” And Paul’s answer was very clear—

- 1 Corinthians 7:17 ¹⁷Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.
- 1 Corinthians 7:24 ²⁴So, brothers, in whatever condition (the word is *calling*) each was called, there let him remain with God.

What is his answer? “General rule - stay put. Bloom where you are planted. Stay in that *calling* in which you were *called*.” Look with me at v.24: Paul uses the word “calling” in two different ways: the first “calling” is your life situation—married/single, Slave/free, your job, etc. - the second “calling” is your calling to salvation in Christ. So he’s saying this: “The rule of thumb is, stay where you were, doing what you were, when God saved you!”

- Oh, this is so practical. He is saying that the things we think are the most important things about us, don’t determine our walk with Christ. You can be married or single, at a good job or a crummy job, and still walk with Christ. We think that these things make or break us spiritually. Paul would say, “Nope. God’s bigger than any of these things. Learn to be content in Christ wherever you are, before you consider changing your circumstances. It could be that God wants to change you through your nasty circumstances, right?”

See your job as a *calling* of God on your life. God has called you to Christ—and He has also

called you to your job! And He does both for His glory.

- Cotton Mather: “Every Christian should have a calling . . . there should be some special business . . . wherein a Christian should for the most part spend the most of his time; and this, that so he may glorify God . . . Oh let every Christian walk with God when he works at his calling, act in his occupation with an eye to God, act as under the eye of God.”
- Richard Steele: “He that hath lent you talents hath also said, “Occupy till I come!” How is it that ye stand all day idle? . . . Your trade is your proper province.”

Steele was referring to Jesus’ parable in Lk.19 where He commands His followers to “‘Occupy,’ or the ESV says ‘engage in business,’ until I return.” Jesus said, “Work! Keep busy! Be productive, until I return!” What are you doing to occupy until He returns? Every Christian needs an “*occupation*” - a place where you are putting Christ on display through your work, your diligence, your creativity, your service. What you produce. That doesn’t necessarily mean a paid job - but *it’s something constructive that occupies you—until Jesus takes you home!*

- I agree with John Piper in his book, “Don’t Waste Your Life:” The idea that we work just until we can retire and just indulge in leisure until we die is unbiblical. Retirement shouldn’t mean that you have no occupation! It should mean that you have more time for leisure, and also more time to serve Christ in ways you couldn’t while you were working. Don Rivers put in his years at CalTrans and retired - yesterday, he and Caryn were here at the church all day working, spraying weeds. Exercising dominion over God’s creation!

But God didn’t call any of His children to just hang out. Play. We all need recreation. But that’s just what it should be: re-creation to refresh yourself so that you can get back to work. God calls all of His children to some sort of work.

II. What do we work for?

Uh, money. Hello. The paycheck. Well, that’s true, but that’s not the only reason we work. A stay-at-home mom with young kids is working non-stop, without a day off, but she doesn’t get a paycheck. We have many folks who put in hours around the church without getting a paycheck. Money is just one *by-product* of our work, but it’s not our only reason and motivation for working. We work so that we aren’t a burden to others—

- 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 . . . aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

And remember what we saw back in—

- Ephesians 4:28 ²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

We work to have money to help others.

- Acts 20:34-35 ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to *my* necessities and *to those who were with me*. ³⁵In all things I have shown you that by working hard in

this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' ”

One of the reasons we work is to have money to support others in their ministries. MBC is incredibly generous. We shared at our annual meeting a few weeks ago that our little church sent almost \$40K around the world to support the work of the Gospel - it went to Ukiah to support CFLC, it went to Vallejo to support TCBS, and Potter Valley to support Hartstone - and some of it stayed right here to keep MBC holding forth the Gospel.

- A huge part of Paul's ministry in his missionary journeys was taking up a collection from all the Gentile churches to help out the Jewish-Christians living in Jerusalem. His letter to the Philippians is a thank you for their contribution. And in 2 Cor. he spends 2 chapters praising the churches in Macedonia for their generosity in giving.

Pastors like me are supported so that we can devote full-time to ministry, especially studying and preaching:

- 1Ti 5:17-18 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. [the honor he is talking about here is financial support For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."]

Someone has to work to feed the ox!

Many people would quit their jobs in a heartbeat if they had all the money they needed. Scripture would say: "Oh no! Keep working because God calls you to work, and to make money for the needs of others."

- William Perkins: "The main end of our lives . . . is to serve God in the serving of men in the works of our callings . . . Some man will say perchance: 'What, must we not labor in our callings to maintain our families?' I answer 'this must be done, but this is not the scope and end of our lives. The true end of our lives is to do service to God in serving of men.'"

So we work because that's where God put us to display His glory as His garden-keepers. And our work is a divine calling on our lives to support ourselves and do good for others.

III. How to learn to love your job.

Let me give you 4 ways to learn to love your job:

1. Get a new boss!

Don't worry so much about changing jobs, just change bosses, make up your mind that tomorrow morning - or Tuesday (President's Day), you will do your work for Jesus Christ. Look at it again, and see how this can transform your work—

- Slaves obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, *as you would Christ*, ⁶not by the way of eye-service (i.e., as a *clock-watcher*), or as *people-pleasers*, but as *slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart*, ⁷*rendering service with a good will as to the Lord* and not to man, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, this *he will receive back from the Lord*, whether he is a *slave* or is free.

And over in Colossians Paul said—

- Colossians 3:23-24 ²³Whatever you do, work *heartily*, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ!

If you're a mom, home with the kids, you can do your housework and love on your kids for Jesus Christ; If you are hammering and nailing, typing, selling, serving customers, or preparing sermons--do it for Jesus Christ - as service and worship to Him - and expecting a reward from Him. That's what it says.

If you are serving the omniscient Lord Jesus Christ, you won't be watching the clock. You will work with diligence and excellence to please Him—

- In his book *Lyrics*, Oscar Hammerstein tells of the time he saw a picture of the top of the head of the Statue of Liberty taken from a helicopter. He was amazed at the detail and the painstaking work that had gone into this lady's head, and then it occurred to him that when the sculptor did this, he could not have imagined in his wildest dreams that one day there would be a device that could enable men to see the top of that head. But that sculptor had given as much care and attention to the part he thought no one would see as he did to the rest of the statue.

Brother Lawrence was a Carmelite monk in France in the 1600's. He was so clumsy that he was constantly breaking things, but he served faithfully as a cook for 30 years in his monastery. What is interesting is that Brother Lawrence hated kitchen work, but his great goal in life was to turn his work into worship to God. A friend wrote this about him:

"His very countenance was edifying, such a sweet and calm devotion appearing in it as could not but affect the beholders. And it was observed that in the greatest hurry of business in the kitchen he was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit. "The time of business," said he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

2. Make your work a witness.

Now I'm not talking about witnessing to people when you should be working. That is not spiritual—that's stealing! If your boss or your company is paying you to do a certain job, then that is what Christ would have you do. But the way you do your work can be a tremendous witness:

- Some of you remember Tom and Carole Bell. Tom pastored Grace EV Free in Kelseyville for several years. Janice and I knew Tom back in our college days when he worked as a salesman for a big carpet company in L.A. Part of the sales pitch for this company involved lying about the deal they were offering. Tom, refused to do that--he told his boss he was a Christian and that he didn't need to lie to sell carpeting. His boss said, "Produce or you're fired." So Tom became their #1 salesman - without lying! He honored the Lord, and the Lord honored him, and he had many opportunities to share the Gospel

I mean, if you just work the way this passage tells you to work, you are going to shine like a light wherever you work, right?

- Philippians 2:14-15 ¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

The worse the work place, the more crooked the boss, the more opportunity you have to shine like a light. You will have people asking you what makes you different!

3. Let God grow the fruit of the Spirit through your work:

And I mean be intentional about this: Say, "Lord, what fruit of the Spirit do you want to grow in me, while I'm at this job?" Love, joy, peace. . . Most of you have a good 40 hours a week to put into serious discipleship! Don't waste this time being discontent - put your shoulder to the plow and make the most of it!

I know a man who worked 20 years for a crooked boss who cheated him constantly. When this man began working for this crooked boss, he was a liar himself who was on the run from a brother who wanted to kill him for cheating him. At the end of those 20 years, he had learned to trust God, and God had built character into that man. The man's name was Jacob—

- Genesis 31:38-42 ³⁸These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. ³⁹What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. [but listen to where Jacob's trust was after these 20 hard years] ⁴²If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. [but] God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands. . .

The trials that God allows us to go through now are a small price to pay for a Christlike character that will last for all of eternity! I want you to apply this passage to your work—

- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 ¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Your job is your assignment from God, a calling from the Lord. He has you there to serve Jesus Christ, to be a witness, to offer up your work as worship to Him--and He has you there to grow the fruit of the spirit in your life—

"But my job is really awful!" Well I grew up out in the country back in Indiana, and I learned that things grow best in *manure*--and I think that includes the fruit of the spirit! But that's fruit that lasts forever.