

COLOSSIANS

The Christian Employee

Colossians 3:22-25

Ephesians 6:5-8

INTRODUCTION

One does not have to be an economist to figure out that our American economy is in trouble. Trade deficits in the multiple billions, foreign competition beating out U.S. products, American products under built and overpriced, the Federal Reserve curbing free enterprise and a hundred other woes plaguing our society indicate our nation is on shaky ground.

Perhaps, however, the biggest problem we face is that of job dissatisfaction by the average laborer in the U.S.A. Job dissatisfaction leads to poor productivity. People are discontent, frustrated and disillusioned in their jobs and offices. Most people have heard of “executive burnout” but few people really understand there is a greater phenomenon called “employee burnout.” In jobs with strict hours, repetitive tasks, regularity, no incentive, there is more depression, loss of appetite, insomnia and alcohol and drug abuse. Someone has said, “Not many laborers are bored to death today but many are bored to sickness. In a day when labor is paid better than ever, blue-collar resentment is high, productivity low and absenteeism at an all time record.

Why this job dissatisfaction? Could it be we in America have abandoned the Christian work ethic? Could it be that men and women no longer believe God has the solution to the problems of labor and management? Could it be that we are living in a post-Christian era in our country? J. Gretchen Machen said, “America is living on the momentum of a godly ancestry. When that momentum runs out, God help America!”

What made America great was the Christian work ethic, which we have lost. And what will make America great again will be a return to the Christian work ethic. I’m not suggesting that Christianity will solve every problem capital and labor face, but I am suggesting that a return to the basic principles of work as set down in Ephesians 6:5-9 and other places in the Bible will go a long way to solving the job dissatisfaction and the economic crisis of America as it will for any country.

ACTIVITY OF THE EMPLOYEE (6:5a): *Slaves, obey your earthly masters*

Paul commands slaves to be obedient to their masters. The word “obey” is a military term, which means, “to follow orders.” Slaves were not a small, isolated group in the Roman Empire. Scholars have estimated at the time Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians half the Roman Empire was slaves to the other half (about 160 million slaves) and some of the slaves were Christians.

The Christian gospel was first accepted among the lower classes in the Roman Empire. This was the working class. Many of the slaves were captured royalty, very educated, government officials and professionals but they were made slaves. Undoubtedly this produces a great deal of slave dissatisfaction.

Slavery was a very cruel system in the Roman Empire. Augustus killed a slave because he accidentally killed Augustus's pet quail. Polio threw one of his slaves in a pond filled with man-eating fish because the slave dropped a glass goblet. Often the working conditions for slaves were abominable because sinful men tend to abuse authority.

The majority of people who made up local churches in Paul's day were slaves. There were a few slave-masters among them. In the church, sane slaves would teach the masters and some slaves might be elders who had ecclesiastical authority over their masters. Christians were taught that in Christ there was no slave or free. ***“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*** (Gal 3:28). In the church, slave-masters and slaves were equal and all were brothers in Christ. However, when they went to their homes and their places of work, the question arose, “Are we to continue this relationship as brothers in our work? Does this mean we are free from any responsibility to slave masters?” Paul answers this question very clearly - be obedient to all slave-masters, even the cruel ones.

You are probably saying to yourself, “How does first century slavery apply to twentieth century employees?” The difference between a slave and an employee is one of degree not kind. In seeking employment, we voluntarily sell our bodies and minds to another for a limited period of time. We work out a mutually agreeable relationship and within the limits of that agreement we are slaves to those to whom we sell our time and freedom. The issue then is the same for the employee as the slave - how should I conduct myself toward those to whom I have responsibilities of obedience in the realm of work? How am I to treat my boss or immediate superior? Paul says, “obey” or put in the common language, “Do what the boss says!”

We should notice Paul does not speak out against slavery. Paul knew the Old Testament approved of slavery, but Old Testament slavery was governed by the moral law of God, making it much different than slavery in the pagan Roman Empire. As a godless institution, Roman slavery was neither condoned nor condemned by Paul. He merely accepted the structure of society as it was. Paul's command to Christian slaves was to be the best slaves they could possibly be. Why? Because through obedience, slave-masters would see Christ in the slaves and they would have opportunity to witness for Christ. Their lives would cause masters to say, “How come you Christian slaves work so hard, produce so much more and have a cheerful spirit in work?” The Christian slaves could then answer, “Because we have Christ in our hearts and He tells us to work for the glory of God.”

Notice what the Apostle Paul did not say to these slaves. He does not tell them to strike or picket. He does not encourage them to be involved in sit-downs, stand-ups or lay-ins. There is no advice on how to organize slaves so as to bring pressure against slave-masters. There is not one word about violence to achieve social justice or economic parity. If anyone ever had a case to speak out against social injustice and the entrenched evil of slavery, it was Paul and the other writers of the New Testament. But there is not a spoken or written word against slavery. There is not the slightest hint of revolt or rebellion against the system of slavery.

Yet, as we look back over 2000 years, it was Christianity, which broke the yoke of slavery and eliminated it in the world. It was done not through revolt, rebellion and violence but through love, faith and obedience. One exception to this was the American War between the States (Civil War) in which violence was used to end slavery, but even before the war began; slavery according to the black race was slowly being eliminated.

Edward Gibbons book The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire says, “While that great body (the Roman Empire) was invaded by open violence or undermined by slow decay a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigor from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the cross in the ruins of the capital.”

God’s way to achieve social and economic justice is not man’s way. Man’s way is struggle, violence, rebellion and revolt which only tears up society and produces a terrible power struggle between management and labor. God’s way is for Christians to love, show integrity, live honestly and work hard. It takes faith to believe God, but history has proved that when it has been tried it works. ***“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”*** (Col. 3:22-24).

ATTITUDE OF THE EMPLOYEE 6:5b-7

Respectfully: ***With respect and fear*** - Christian slaves were to respect the position of their masters. God has instituted an order of authority so society will run smoothly, and Christians are to respect authority at every level. “Fear” is a healthy respect for authority but it does not mean a Christian is to be a trembling, spineless person in the presence of his boss.

If a Christian employee has a superior over him (a boss, a foreman, an office manager or a sales manager) who is over-bearing in personality, despicable in character or corrupt in morals, if he cannot be respected as a man, the Christian can respect the position. The natural tendency is to detest the person, to agitate for justice and to confront and struggle with the superior for better relationships, understanding and working conditions.

This does not mean a Christian should not use all the legal means at his disposal to improve his working conditions but revolt and violence should not characterize the true Christian. Nor does this mean a Christian cannot be part of a labor union or strike if necessary but it does mean a Christian cannot be involved in open rebellion.

Sincerely. ***And with sincerity of heart*** - The Christian worker is to display honesty of purpose and simplicity of motive with his employer. There is to be allegiance to the boss.

Employees are to be loyal to the boss unless the boss asks the Christian to go against the moral law of God. If the boss asks the Christian to lie, steal or cheat, the Christian must say “no.” If the boss demands sexual favors from the secretary if she expects to get raises, she must refuse. If a Christian doctor or nurse is asked to perform an abortion to keep a position, the person must not do it. What Paul is saying is that Christianity makes a person a better employee, and, if it does not, something is wrong with that persons Christianity.

Willingly: ***Just as you would obey Christ*** - Employees are to obey employers not only because Christ asked them but they are to obey in the same way they obey Christ. Obedience is not primarily based on the goodness of slave-masters or employers because many do not deserve it, but Christians give obedience because Christ wants them to do it.

When we begin to do our jobs because it pleases Christ and we do the work for Him, it revolutionizes our whole concept of work. Our chief concern is to please only Christ not the boss. If we try to please two different forces, we will be torn apart by conflicting tensions. If we please Christ in our work, we will please our boss.

Conscientiously: ***Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is upon you,*** - The first concept here is that Christians should not try to gain the favor of employers in a false way. Buttering up the boss, men pleasing, apple-polishing and goldbricking are not God’s way to please an employer. God’s way is loyalty and hard work. The employee is to give the employer eight hours for eight hours pay. This also applies to witnessing for Christ on the job. Use breaks, lunch times or other free time to talk to someone about Christ. Time is money, and the Christian employee should desire to make money for the company. The second concept in this verse is that Christians are not only to work when the boss is watching. If the boss is not there, Christians still keep working. We do not work to impress the boss but to impress our Heavenly Boss.

In Richmond, VA. there is an old plantation. The original plantation owner had his body buried in a tomb on a hill overlooking the fields. He did this so the slaves would think he was still watching over them when he died. They said it worked because of the superstition of the black slaves.

Loyalty: ***But like slaves of Christ*** - Christians are slaves. We are voluntary slaves of Jesus Christ and we work on divine principles not human principles. We work to please Christ. ***“Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants (slaves) of God.”*** (I Pet. 2:16). We must please the Sovereign Master not an earthly master.

William Barkley said, “The conviction of the Christian workman is that every single piece of work he produces must be good enough to show God.”

Graciously: ***Doing the will of God from the heart*** - Christians are to serve their employers graciously and spontaneously from the heart. They must want to benefit the employer whenever and however possible.

What is the will of God? Not only that we obey, but also the will of God is our work. The very work we are doing, where we are doing it, with the people we must work with, under the present circumstances and conditions is the will of God for us. God has created man to work and only the toilsome part of work came with man’s fall into sin. Men must work and it is God’s will for all men. Our work is called our vocation. The word “vocation” means “calling” in the Latin. Our work is our calling. God has called each person to his work. He is in full-time Christian work being a mechanic, farmer, lawyer, doctor, teacher, plumber or whatever. Not just preachers and missionaries are in full-time work but every Christian is called to his job so he can serve Christ in the work in which he lives. There is no distinction made between work that is religious and work that is secular. All work is religious because all work is of God.

When William Carey applied for a foreign missionary service, somebody said to him, “What is your business?” They intended it as a slur, for he was not a minister. He said, “My business is serving the Lord, and I make shoes to pay expenses.” And so every one engaged in any occupation should be able to say, “My business is serving the Lord, and whatever my occupation, that is to pay my expenses, but I am there to serve Christ.”

Eagerly: ***Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,*** - Again Paul stresses we work to please Christ not men. We must operate on divine principles not human principles. The Christian is to look forward to going to work. It is not to be a dreaded, boring, humdrum event. Why? Because he is working for the Lord. When we work for the Lord it gives dignity to our work no matter how menial or unimportant it seems to us.

AWARENESS OF THE EMPLOYEE (6:8): ***Because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.*** - Under Roman law a slave could not possess any property, and yet here is promised a reward and in Colossians 3:24,25, it says he will gain a heavenly inheritance: ***“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.”***

The Lord Jesus is the Big Boss in the sky who is always watching us with His sovereign eye. Christ Himself employs us. He sees our work and He will reward us accordingly. This means He will bless us in this life for our good deeds, and will reward us in eternity at the Judgment Seat of Christ for how well we did our jobs in this life. Payday does not come every two weeks for God's children but it ultimately comes at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We may not receive in this life all the rewards, praise and glory we deserve for faithful service to our employers but we will receive them at the Judgment Seat of Christ when He returns in His second advent.

CONCLUSION

Saved

As Christians, we must work on our jobs for Christ. We must realize we were created to work and when we stop working we stop living. We must not let the pressures, the competition and frustrations of work rob us of the joy of work. We must never make a dichotomy between work that is sacred and work that is secular because all work is sacred. One of the basic reasons Christians get job burnout is because they have lost the Christian work ethic. We must live on Monday through Saturday the same truths that we claim to believe on Sunday.

J. Vernon McGee says, "It would change the entire complexion of American life today if we were obedient and loyal to those to whom we owe obedience and loyalty. A man is not a Christian, regardless of his profession of Christ, when he is disloyal to his employer, his family, his home, his church and his pastor. When he is disloyal in these areas of his life, he will be disloyal also to Christ."

Unsaved

Perhaps you are not a Christian and you are saying. "I would like to get a Christian view of work. How can I do it?" The starting point is to allow Christ to invade your life. You must believe in Him as your Savior and bow to Him as your Lord.

The Bible says, "***Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.***" (Rom. 10:13). Call upon Christ, believe in Him, trust yourself completely to Him and He will forgive your sins, grant you eternal life and invade your very being. Then He will begin to give you a divine viewpoint on work and supernatural power to work your job for God's glory. Then work will become a joy rather than a burden.