

The Christian church is an amazing institution – it brings together people from all walks of life. And it really saddens me when sometimes churches are built around a certain age-group, or a certain socio-economic group, and if you're not part of that target group, then you know you're not really welcome (we mightn't ever get told that we're not welcome, but we feel it, and we know it).

And my hope is that we would be very aware of this here. If someone new walks into this church, and you feel, "Well, I've got nothing in common with them..", well think again. Because if they're a Christian, they're your brother. If they're not yet a Christian, well they're just like what you were – a sinner, lost in their sins, seeking a saviour... And so you've got a lot in common with them.

You see, the Christian church, should be a place where: young and old; rich and poor; educated and uneducated; simple and brilliant; athletes and plodders; bushies & townies; high society and lower classes; blacks & whites & all other colours in-between – all come together on an equal footing....

A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned that this letter to the Ephesians, was revolutionary in its day, in that it actually talked to the kids (because back then [in the Greco-Roman world], kids were considered as nothing),,, but even **more** revolutionary than this, as we get further into this letter, we realise there are slaves and there are **masters** of slaves, all in the very same church.

And Paul is addressing **them** as equals. They are **all** sons and daughters of God. **Not one** is higher than the other in the church.... And in the church, if we are appointing a minister or an elder, it's got nothing to do with their social standing –

it's got nothing to do with their wealth or prosperity, or their occupation, or whether they're a businessman or a worker – it's got nothing to do with any of that. It's got everything to do with God's call and the gifts that God has given them.

The spiritual gifts are the great leveller of the church. And so in the church, the slave (if that slave has a gift of teaching) can become the teacher of the master. And the master is servant of the slave, as the slave is servant of the master, because as disciples of Christ, we serve each other. Christ knelt down, wrapped a towel around his waste, and started washing filthy feet... - we serve one-another.

Some people today really battle with certain pieces of scripture (including this one), because it talks about slaves and masters. And of course, today most of us are repulsed by the very idea of slavery. Just the thought that one person could own another person is absolutely abhorrent to us... But that's the world in which they lived. There was no social security. There was no unemployment benefits. And if someone found themselves in hardship, they could sell themselves as a slave, and they'd have food and a place to live, and they'd have work. Of course there **were** those who were enslaved **against** their will (through military conquest) – it was the world in which they lived. *And it wasn't until the 1800's, under the influence of **Christians** like William Wilberforce and John Newton, that finally slavery was outlawed in Britain and its colonies.*

Let me be clear – this passage does not promote slavery – and I think you know that – and anyone who says that it does, is really up to mischief and misrepresenting what it says. What it does, is it teaches us about sacrificial living – it's about

submission in the work place for Christ. And so if you find that you are a slave, be a good slave, so when your master sees your obedience and your work ethic, you're giving Christ a good name. And if you find that you are a master **of** a slave, be a good master – treat your slaves well. Because there's no favouritism with God.

But for us today, I want to take this passage which was originally addressing the slave / master relationship, and I want to apply it today, to our equivalent – the employee / employer relationship....

For somewhere near half of our waking lives, we'll be working. And if we cut Christ out of that enormous piece of our lives, that decreases markedly, the opportunities we have to minister for Christ.

We cannot compartmentalise our lives. We cannot just be all good and spiritual when we go to church on a Sunday, and then on Monday, when we go to work, be a slovenly employee... We are disciples of Jesus Christ. We are His disciples: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And we serve Christ **every** day, and in **every** place we go. And so we serve Christ in the work place....

For about the last month now, we've been in a section of the letter to the Ephesians, which has been teaching us about sacrificial living. And today we're considering, "How do we, as disciples of Jesus Christ, practice sacrificial living in the work place?"

And of course, what we do at work, will depend very much on our occupation. Put your hand up if you're in full time Christian ministry? ... Maybe you feel your job gets in the way of your full time Christian ministry....

What we have to realise is, "Our work (where God has put us, for most of our waking hours) – Our work, is our Christian ministry."

- If you're a shearer, be the best shearer that you can be, for Christ.
- a boiler maker, be the best boiler maker you can for Christ.
- a teacher; nurse; machinery operator; rubbish collector, be the best one of those that you can be for Christ.
- If you're a student, be the best student that you can be, for Christ.

Paul tells us to obey our bosses, with fear and trembling – with a sincere heart. What does that mean?

Well, obedience is something a lot of us just don't like to give. Sometimes we just want to do things our own way, or we don't want to do it at all – we want to be masters of our own domain... But obedience, is commanded by God. Remember when we talked about marriage, we saw that God's system of governance, is that He appoints some to be leaders, and others to be subject to that leadership, and so we have leadership and loyalty.

Well, it's the same in the work place. Some are entrusted with leadership, and the rest of us are to respect that, with our loyalty. And if you're getting paid to do a job, you're getting

paid to do it the way the boss wants you to do it. And this might sound very old fashioned to you, but to be obedient to your boss, is exactly what God commands... And we are to do it with a sincere heart – what does that mean????

(show cartoon)

What it means is, “Don’t just be obedient when the boss is looking” – don’t just be obedient to get in his good-books, and then do other sneaky things behind his back.... Work as if you are a slave to Christ, because that’s exactly what we are.

A management consultant died and turned up at the pearly gates. “There must be some mistake”, he said to St Peter. “I’m only 54 and I’ve died already – that’s way too early”.

To which St Peter replied “Well, according to the times you’ve been billing out to your clients, you’ve got to be at least 87”ⁱ.

So we obey with a sincere heart, as we would Christ. We don’t just pretend to be obedient when the boss is looking, so we can get in the good-books – we serve our bosses, to the best of our ability, even when nobody’s watching – that’s what integrity is all about.

Integrity is who you are, when no-one is watching.

Paul uses the phrase **doing the will of God from the heart**,⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man

Part of sacrificial living, is to give of our best. It is the will of God for us to work. *You know, in this day and age, it’s really*

pushed upon us “think of your retirement”. It seems that one of the highest goals in life, is to work for as short-a time as we can, and retire as early as we can. And then we try to live for as long as we can. And so if you retire at 65 and die at 105, you need enough super to keep you going for 40 years... Is it any wonder our country’s going broke???

It is the will of God, that we should work... that doesn’t mean that we should be work-a-holics or never take a rest, but there is something very Godly about working. Never be ashamed that you work. Never be ashamed if your job is that of a labourer, or a secretary, or if you’re the person who’s at the bottom of a very high chain of command. It is God’s will that we should work, and when we work, we are rendering service to God – not to man.

And so when **you** turn up for work, don’t do it grudgingly – do it with a good will, to please the Lord.

But why would we do that? What’s in it for **us**? When all the other employees are slacking off, and it appears that they’re getting rewarded for their slackness.... What’s in it for us, to work hard???

You might find yourself in a very difficult situation. Your productivity may be far higher than your work mates, and so they tell you to slow down because you’re making everyone else look bad. You might get told “hey that’s not our culture”. Our culture is to take really long smoko breaks, with only an hour of real work between breaks... What do you do?

Well, you do what your boss has told you to do... Where’s the reward???

V⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

Alright, on the day of judgment, we will be rewarded, for the good work that we've done in the work place – work that your boss may never be aware of... But God sees it. The Lord knows about it, and you will be rewarded.

Now, this is where the passage gets revolutionary.

⁹ Masters, do the same to them

Obviously that doesn't mean the masters obey the slaves – that would be a bit back-to-front... What it means is, as a disciple of Christ, whether you be a master or whether you be a slave – whether you be a boss, or whether you be a worker... – we are to serve in that capacity, sacrificially.

We've been talking about sacrificial service as a slave (or as an employee), and now the masters, or the employers, are to do the same.

Employers, lead sacrificially... This is revolutionary. This is something that will cost you. .. Lead for the benefit of your employees – not simply for your own gain... Now what does that look like?

Well, Paul is very practical here. While he only gives us one example, I think you'll agree with me, that it says a lot:

9 Masters, 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.

Employers, I wonder if you have ever considered, that as an employer, this is your ministry??? That your Christian ministry is to provide for your employees. Men and women need jobs, and if God has blessed you with a business, well that's not so you can sack half your staff, and drive the remainder twice as hard to make a bigger profit... Just as Christian employees are serving Christ in **their** work, Christian employers are serving Christ in their provision of employment. You may feel that **you're** the master, but you're not. You and your staff, both have a master, and He is in heaven.

Sacrificial living, is not something that the Christian employer, is exempt from.

Yeah, you may **feel** that you have a right as an employer to dish it out to your staff... – You do **not** have that right....”

You treat your employees, in the same way:

One day I heard someone say, “*Never expect your employees to do something that **you're** not willing to do.*” And I reckon that was good advice:

- When the boss goes out in the hot sun to chip Bathurst Burr **with** a labourer – that's sacrificial leadership.
- When the boss takes his turn at the night time water shifts to give his tiring workers a rest – that's sacrificial leadership

- When the boss says “I’ll work this Christmas so you can have this one off with your family” – that’s sacrificial leadership
- When the seasons turn bad, and the boss cuts **his** spending and pulls in **his** belt, so his employees can keep **their** jobs – that’s sacrificial leadership in the work place.

Bosses, don’t threaten your employees. Don’t abuse them. Don’t take advantage of them.... Because God is our master, and simply because you’re the employer, that doesn’t mean that you’ll get any special treatment.

I reckon there’s a pretty big challenge there, for all of us. Whether you be an employer, or an employee – there’s an enormous challenge.

If you’re an employee, work as if you’re working for Christ (even if your boss is the biggest mongrel around).

If you’re an employer, treat your workers as you would want to be treated yourself, because the Lord our God, sees all.

This is our Christian witness in the workplace. At work, it’s not right for you to take most of the day (on your boss’ time) to sit down and tell people about Jesus (sometimes God might be telling you to do that, but not all the time). However, it **is** right to be a visual display – to be a living, breathing, working example of a slave of Jesus Christ. There’s your witness in the workplace.

So be witness for Christ in your work place, or in your school, by how you serve.....

Questions???

ⁱ Readers Digest –laughter, the best medicine. Westmount. Quebec. 1998. Page 53