

“Our Greatest Mission Field”

Ephesians 6: 5-9

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September 1, 2002

Labor Day Weekend

I think Paul threw them a curve ball. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians about their work habits, I think he surprised them. Since they were slaves, as all non-Romans were, perhaps they thought Paul would encourage them to rebel against their masters or boycott their responsibilities. Not only does Paul refuse to encourage this kind of behavior, but he does the very opposite. He instructs his readers to be obedient, respectful, conscientious, industrious and dependable. Why?

Paul was an evangelist. His obsession in life was to share the Gospel with others. He took advantage of every opportunity to do that, sometimes in deplorable living and working conditions. He challenged his readers to do the same.

Paul knew that outside the home, there was no place where a person would have greater impact upon others than the work place. This was the place where people would rub shoulders with those who were struggling with life and faith. It was Paul’s desire that all Christians see the work place as a **mission field** and take advantage of every opportunity to share the Gospel in word and deed.

Therefore, Paul wrote to the early Christians about the kind of workers they needed to be in order to influence the people around them. It is not that he was unconcerned about their working conditions but that he was more concerned about their Christian witness.

This raises a question that I want to answer this morning. If the workplace is to be our mission field, then what kind of worker are we to be? According to Paul, we are to be **respectful of those in authority**. “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear” Ephesians 6:5. Even when conditions or circumstances are not ideal, and they certainly were not in Paul’s day, workers still need to be courteous. The Bible never gives us a license to be unkind. Nothing destroys our witness any quicker than an uncontrolled temper. Remember, more is at stake on the job than working conditions. The eternal destiny of others is at risk. Don’t do anything to lead a person down the wrong path, even if it means enduring some hardships. When changes need to be made where you work, do so in a way that reflects positively upon your faith.

We need to be conscientious about our work. The quality of our work should be so good that we would be anxious to show it to God.

When you were a child and did well on a paper at school, do you recall what you did with it? In all likelihood, you took it home to show your parents. You wanted their approval and affirmation. The quality of your work on your job needs to be so good that you would be anxious to show it to God, not hide it from Him.

As a matter of fact, we need to see God as our employer, not an earthly person. “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” 6:7. Everything on the job should be done to meet His standards and expectations. Such an attitude would lead to nothing but the best from every worker and speaks volumes about the Christian faith.

A nurse working in an Appalachian hospital was noted for her excellent skills. A doctor said to her, “Why are you working here? You could go to the city and make a lot

more money. God knows you are worth it!” She replied, “If God knows I am worth it, that’s all that matters.”

We need to be industrious. Paul used the phrase “with sincerity of heart and wholeheartedly.” This referred to “an eagerness that does not wait to be compelled.” In other words, a good worker is a self-starter who looks for things to do that will increase productivity.

I like a quote I read many years ago. “Some workers are like wheelbarrows. They go only as far as they are pushed.” I hope this does not describe you.

Finally, Paul encouraged his readers to be dependable. A person who served “wholeheartedly” was a person that was fully dedicated and committed to a task. They would not walk away until the job was finished.

Paul knew this kind of worker would have a tremendous impact upon those around him or her. These work habits would not go unnoticed. They won’t today, either.

You and I know that the way we treat others and work will be the only sermon that some people will hear. As Christians, our work habits will draw people closer to God or lead them farther away. For sure, a Christian with bad work habits has almost no chance of leading a fellow worker to Christ. People will not hear what you say for what you do or don’t do on the job.

This truth applies not only to workers but also to those in **authority**. This was why Paul wrote, “Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven and there is no favoritism with Him” 6:9.

Encouraging masters to be good was a radical idea. Reminding them that they were servants in the eyes of God and would be held accountable for their actions was unheard of. Yet, Paul boldly told them they were and instructed them to be respectful, honest, fair, and dependable. The Golden Rule applied to them, too.

How does this translate into our culture? If you own a business, answer these questions. “If I were in need of a job, would I work here? Would I work for me?” I hope so, and one day when you stand before God, you will, too.

Bobby Ukrop and his family own a chain of twenty-eight Super Markets in Central Virginia. For each of the past three years, his business has been listed in *Fortune* magazines “100 Best Companies to Work For.” I am not surprised.

The company’s mission statement is “to serve our customers and communities efficiently and effectively while treating our customers, employees and suppliers as we personally like to be treated.” Along side familiar core values such as superior customer service, superior quality and freshness and cost consciousness is “a commitment to honesty, fairness and acting openly, equitably and consistently in all we do.”

“It’s very important that I practice what I preach, whether it’s picking up trash in the parking lot or trying to set a good example by how I speak to a customer or employees. I try to model the behavior I desire in my employees.”

Paul would be pleased with Bobby Ukrop. I hope he would be pleased with you and me, too.