

EPHESIANS WEEK #13 - SJGC

## **Spirit-Filled Relationships - Work**

Ephesians 6:5-9

### **PATTI**

We've been exploring what the book of Ephesians teaches about Spirit-filled relationships.

Two weeks ago we looked at the primary relationship of husband and wife in marriage.

Last week it was parents and children.

And today in these few simple verses, relationships within the workplace.

The bible talks about master and servant, but thankfully, today, we would say employer and employee or manager and employee.

This is important when you consider (for most of us, at least) how much of our time and our lives are built around work.

Surprisingly, most books about Christian discipleship tell you how to follow Jesus at night and on weekends. And virtually nobody is telling you how to be a Christian on the job.

So let's address some background issues in this passage and then move into practical application.

Being a follower of Jesus reorients every part of your life. Paul is showing people how to be filled with the Spirit continually. In chapter 5 he said that part of what that looks like is to

**"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."**

Then he moves into all areas of life to show how Spirit-filled people relate to those around them. When the Bible talks about what it means to be filled with the Spirit, it always talks about the heart.

### **JEFF**

In English, the word “heart” means the emotions, and it is opposed to the head, which is why you’ll hear people say, “My head tells me one thing, but my heart tells me something else.”

In American culture the heart and head are pitted against one another. But in the Bible the heart is considered the seat of the whole soul.

That means you can **think** with your heart, you can **will** with your heart, and you can **feel** with your heart.

This even explains the lyrics to a popular worship song from a few years ago that said, *“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.”*

**For Paul, the heart is the seat of the mind, the will, and the emotions.**

And the way you know that the Spirit of God is really affecting your heart is that your faith is not one dimensional. It’s not all emotion or behavior or intellect.

If faith is only intellectual, you probably know a lot of facts about God and the Bible, yet there’s no emotional sense of the presence or nearness of God;

no passion or warmth or emotion,  
never much change in behavior or habits.

On the other hand, some people  
dutifully show up to worship each week,  
but don't know much Scripture and  
don't have a relationship with God,  
because their Sunday ritual is a habit that  
doesn't carry over into the rest of their week.

Still others think, "Because worship is a great  
emotional experience for me,  
"I must be filled with the Spirit."

### **PATTI**

But these verses tell us that  
being Spirit-filled involves the whole self;  
Being Spirit-filled involves progressive transformation  
in every area of life and relationships,  
including the workplace.

Another background issue that comes up  
in this passage is, 'Does it condone slavery?'

There have been two kinds of enemies of the gospel  
who have really misused this passage.  
Unfortunately, one group were church members  
and pastors who didn't think they were enemies of the gospel.  
But they used this passage to justify slavery in the South.

The other group misuses this passage by saying that  
it condones slavery, and that for that reason,  
the bible is backward, immoral, and unreliable.

But both of these views are misguided.  
The reason I know, and the reason you should know

that slavery is wrong is because we believe the Bible's entire revelation.

This particular passage doesn't say, "Slaves should go free," because Paul isn't addressing that issue. The context here is "what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit, and how is that going to affect all of your relationships today and tomorrow?"

The Bible never deals with a social issue abstractly. It always deals with it from the standpoint of, "How does this relate to your relationship with God?"

So the first thing Paul is going to say to slaves isn't, "Let's debate whether or not it's right or wrong for you to leave, or whether we should start an abolitionist movement."

The first thing he says is, "Tomorrow, if you're filled with the Spirit, how will that affect the way in which you deal with your master?" He's not condoning slavery, but rather addressing in a practical way how slaves are going to live their lives tomorrow.

## **JEFF**

Also, you won't find a verse in the Bible that says, "We need to abandon slavery." Nor does the Bible have a verse that says whether you should belong to a labor union.

Instead the Scripture lays down universal principles.

If it didn't, there would be big sections of the Bible where we could just say, "That doesn't apply to us."

But in the end, who fought to abolish slavery?

It was essentially Christians.

A true historian will ask, not why it took so long to get rid of slavery, but since everybody everywhere did it; since as far back as human beings can remember the strong enslaved the weak and the conquerors enslaved the conquered - why did it ever get into anybody's mind that slavery was wrong?

It was Christians in Great Britain and the U.S., who didn't find particular verses that addressed slavery, but instead applied the Ten Commandments and the golden rule:

William Wilberforce and others reasoned that, if every human being is created in the image of God, then no one has the right to own or sell people.

So when we ask, "Does this passage condone slavery?" The answer is "no" because it simply isn't addressing that question.

So what's the practical application of these verses?

What we have are **TWO PRINCIPLES**.

There are two false views of work that this passage refutes.

**1. The first false view of work is that WORK IS A CURSE, and that leisure is the meaning of life.**

But the text says that you should be doing work as is if it's the will of God, and you should do it from the heart.

**2. The second false view of work is work is THAT WORK ITSELF IS THE MEANING OF LIFE.**

**PATTI**

The first view says, "We work in order to really live."

The second view says, "We live in order to work."

Either leisure is my fulfillment. Or work is my fulfillment.

Both of these views are growing in popularity because God is increasingly being removed from the equation. Which is why both of these views are so dangerous.

If God is out of the picture and work is a curse, then I don't really care whether I'm getting anything done, whether I'm helping anybody, or whether I enjoy what I'm doing.

I just want to get enough dollars so I can really live and do the things that I want. In a situation like that, productivity goes down. Pride in our work goes down; quality of product goes down.

Studies show that one quarter of all American workers are deeply ashamed of what they're producing in the workplace? That's deeply ashamed.

And three quarters of all people in the workplace say, "The quality of the work at this place was better 10 years ago."

When work is perceived to be a curse, dishonesty becomes routine. You don't have pride in your labor. You don't see yourself as a servant of anybody; so you're going to cut corners wherever you can.

You're going to get whatever you can out of people.

for the short term, in order to get the bucks...  
 NOT for the long term good of the economy,  
 or the common good of community,  
 or the wellbeing of individuals.

If work is a curse, you have the  
 temptation of dishonesty.

## **JEFF**

But we have a different problem  
 when people live to work, and  
 work becomes the meaning of life.

When work becomes what defines you,  
 it's the only thing that gives you identity and purpose.  
 The danger of this view is not just workaholism and burn out,  
 but a self-image that is totally tied to  
 job performance and success.

But the fact is that both the  
 temptation of dishonesty and the  
 temptation to overwork both stem  
 from a lack of trust in God.

If you're dishonest in an attempt to get more money,  
 you're really saying, "I can't trust God to take care of me."  
 But if you are burning yourself out by working all the time,  
 you're also saying, "I can't really trust God to supply my needs."

They views both stem from eliminating God from the equation.  
 The Bible says if you work either for money or yourself,  
 the whole society will go down, and  
 you yourself will eventually break down.

The solution is to understand the nature of work in the  
 way that Martin Luther understood it – as a

## **DIVINE VOCATION** or **CALLING**.

And to understand the AIM of work, not as self-fulfillment, but as **SERVICE** and **STEWARDSHIP**, USING YOUR GIFTS to please God.

If you get those two things right, you'll find that an awful lot of your problems, not only in society but in the workplace, will work themselves out.

## **PATTI**

Let's elaborate on each of these a bit.

The Bible tells us that in the beginning there was work, that Adam and Eve were put into the world to care for creation and cultivate it.

We are made in the image of God who loves to create.  
We are made in the image of God who loves to take things and bring the best out of them.  
If there were no sin in the world, you'd still have work.

As far as we know, in heaven there is going to be work. You're built for it, and there can't be real joy without it.

Now, because of sin, work has been cursed,  
**BUT IT'S NOT A CURSE.**  
This is an important distinction.

Work is cursed. That's the reason why God says to Adam and Eve, "You're going to toil in the dust. You're going to try to cultivate the earth, and it will never quite go right. The thorns will come up."

That means no matter how good you are, and no matter how good your work environment is, you're always going to find thorns coming up

in the form of frustrations.

That's different than saying that  
WORK ITSELF IS A CURSE.

Adam and Eve were farmers. They worked with  
their hands and tended the garden.  
It doesn't say so here in Ephesians, but in  
1 Corinthians and several other places in the Bible,  
God says that work is a CALLING.

A calling means God has given you abilities,  
and when you find a job that requires those  
God-given abilities, it will be FULFILLING.

### **JEFF**

In the movie, Chariots of Fire,  
there are these two Olympic-level runners,  
Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams.  
They're both going for the prize.  
They both want the gold medal.  
And they're doing the same work to get there.

But at one point Eric Liddell says to his sister,  
who is afraid he's never going to be a missionary in China,  
(which he eventually he does) - but he says to her,  
"Jennie, you've got to understand: I believe  
God made me for China, but he also made me fast,  
and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

There's a Christian view of work.  
It's a calling ("God made me fast").  
and the Christian aim of work.  
It's not for money and not for yourself,  
but for God ("When I run, I'm pleasing him.")

Meanwhile, Harold Abrahams says,  
"I've never known contentment. I'm forever in pursuit,

and I don't even know what it is I'm chasing."

If you're employed right now, or even if you're retired and volunteering, can you say,  
 "When I do the thing I'm doing with all my might,  
 I think I'm starting to find out who I really am.  
 I'm finding myself and feeling God's pleasure?"

Or do you say, "I'm working like a dog, and I don't even know what I'm working for.  
 There is no joy or contentment in it?"

Which are you closer to? If you're like Harold Abrahams, then you have to say, "Am I working only for money?" or "Am I burning myself out because I'm trying to define myself in terms of my work?"

If you say, "Hey, I don't think I'm doing that either," then thirdly, maybe you just haven't really found the place that fits your gifts.  
 So keep praying and searching.

## **PATTI**

To be useful to people and to use your gifts for God's pleasure is the definition of a CALLING.

Author and missionary, Elisabeth Elliott says,  
 "A clam glorifies God better than you because a clam is doing exactly what it was built to do. It is using its capacities. It is glorifying God by being a clam. It's perfectly everything God meant it to be."

Is that true for you?

Now for the other problem of work as the meaning of life.  
 The way you know you've moved over from work as dignity

to work as being your salvation is that  
your joy is gone and you're burning out.

You say, "What about the fact that I'm scared of losing my job?  
I have too much to do." There are plenty of people for whom  
work is a curse, or for whom work is fulfillment.

Some of them are your bosses.  
So look carefully at your motives.  
What Ephesians says to believers is that  
**you should never work for your boss.**  
You must never work for people.

How was it possible for a slave to get through the day?  
Paul says, "The only way a slave can get through the day  
is to look at the master and, not out loud, but in the heart say,  
'I'm not working for you.'  
I'm working for my Master in heaven.  
I'm going to do the best job with my gifts today;

I'm not going to worry about what you think or feel.  
I am simply going to do what you ask me to do,  
but I'm not working for you."

When you can do that, you can deal with the pressure.  
And don't think that Christian pastors and church staff  
are exempt from this dilemma.  
Of course, we're working for the Lord.  
(But are we really?)

It would be easy to look out on a Sunday morning and think,  
"I really need for them to come back next week and bring somebody."  
That's why I'm preaching. But no! That's not true.

Pastors and church staff have as much of a problem with  
being a slave to YOU as you have being a slave to your boss.

Whenever you take your eye off of Jesus,  
one way or another work will be a curse.  
It will be a millstone around your neck,  
and down you'll go.

Have you felt the pleasure of working for the Lord?

PRAYER:

Father, we thank you for inviting us to partner with you in the stewardship of creation. Empower each one watching tonight to give you control over every aspect of our lives. Fill us with the Holy Spirit, that we may give you pleasure as we use our gifts for your glory and the wellbeing of others. In Jesus' name. Amen.