

Spirit-Filled Workers

Eph. 5:5-8

Intro. The Bible presents no division or dichotomy between spiritual and secular life. The new life we receive through faith in Christ is not just for Sunday worship or time spent on the church campus! It's a 24/7 life that must impact every dimension of who we are. To the believers at Colossae Paul wrote, **And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** The phrase, **whatever you do** is all-inclusive. Nothing is left out. **In the name of the Lord Jesus**, points to a life submitted to Christ or under His authority. **Whatever you do** prevents us from compartmentalizing our lives as if to say, "*Lord Jesus, you can have this part of my life, but not that part. You can have my church life, but not my home or my recreation, or my work life.*" It's been well said that "*If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not lord at all!*"

Let me once again repeat what we've learned about the flow of teaching in Paul's exhortations to the believers at Ephesus.

- **4:1** begins the practical part of Paul's letter. There he wrote, **As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.** A life worthy of our calling is a holy life, a life that is different and distinct from the lives of those who are unsaved.
- This is emphasized further down in **4:17,18** where Paul insists that believers must not continue to think and act as the unsaved do. He wrote, **So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.**
- Then in **chap. 5** Paul characterized the worthy life five ways: In **vs. 2-7** we're challenged to **live a life of love** and purity / in **vs. 8-14** we're called to **live as children of light** / then in **vs.15-17** we're called to live a life of wisdom.

These exhortations are followed by the pivotal command of **5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.** This command is pivotal because it reveals the power that makes change possible. A worthy life / a life of love and purity / and a life of light and wisdom, doesn't come by trying hard...it comes by trusting deep. The holy life God calls us to live out can't be produced by the energies of the flesh. This life is only possible for those who submit to God in obedience to His Word. A Spirit filled life isn't wild and crazy, it's a life where God is in control.

Immediately after the command to **be filled with the Spirit**, Paul described the impact God's Spirit will have in our lives. First, a Spirit filled believer will have a heart filled with songs of praise. Second, he/she will be thankful for everything. Does that describe you as you came to worship this AM? The third description is found in **v. 21 - Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** With all that life throws at us, a heart that keeps singing / remains thankful for everything / and the willingness to submit to others is only possible when we are **filled with the Spirit**. Just as sinners can't get to heaven apart from faith in Jesus, redeemed sinners can't live a holy life apart from the Spirit's filling! We then find that the command to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ is the foundation for the relational commands that follow. Here's how this unfolds...

- In **vs.22-33** the command to **submit to one another** is applied to the relationship of a husband and his wife. She is to submit to his headship and he is to love her sacrificially.
- Then in **6:1-4** the submissive attitude is applied to the relationship between Christian parent and child. Children must submit by obeying their parents, but parents must submit to their children by not exasperating them.

- Now in **6:5-9**, the command **to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ** is applied to slaves or workers and the masters or managers they work for.

So the command for believers to submit to each other applies to church / to marriage / to family life / and even to relations in the workplace. A submissive spirit is to be found on both sides of every relationship...in husbands as well as wives / in parents as well as children / and now (as we'll see this AM), in employers as well in their employees. *The command of 5:21 leaves no room for any believer to be self-asserting / authoritarian / dictatorial / over-bearing / autocratic / bossy / dominating / high-and-mighty / magisterial / or unreasonable in any relationship at any time!*

So what does submission look like? It's shown by a wife who respectfully supports her husband's leadership and by a husband who puts his wife's interests ahead of his own. It's shown by children who obey their parents and parents who refuse to frustrate their children by being over-bearing or unreasonable. This Sunday and next we'll see how mutual submission shows up in the workplace. There's no getting around it...a submissive spirit must be found in all who believe and sincerely want to be like Jesus. In **Matt. 11:28, 29** Jesus said, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart...** Need a picture? Think of Jesus washing His disciple's feet. Holiness is being like Jesus who consistently exemplified a humble and submissive heart. This quality of heart and mind is exactly what the Spirit of God wants to produce in all who believe and rely on His enablement. The questions we must ask ourselves are these..."Do I really want to be like Jesus? Do I trust God enough to obey him and submit to others even when it feels unreasonable and risky to do so?"

Can you even begin to imagine how different the world would be if the Spirit of God was in control of our you and me and each person we interact with day by day? Can you imagine how wonderful church / marriage / home / and work relations could be? I'm thinking it would be like heaven! This is the life we're destined for and the life we're called to pursue here and now. The trouble is, we're still in this world and so much of the world is still in us. We still tend to be selfish and to have things go our way. Paul exposed the problem in **I Cor. 3:3** where he wrote, **You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?**

Now think about the progression of thought here in **chap. 5** and **6**. If mutual submission is found anywhere, we ought to find it in the church among people we love and trust...people bound together by common allegiance to Jesus Christ. After all, **the church of the living God (is) the pillar and foundation of the truth. (I Tim. 3:15)** And we might expect to find submission in marriages where a Christian man and woman have committed themselves to each other in love. It ought to show up in the way believing children relate to their parents. Yet the fact is...in a world where personal rights are paramount, this concept of mutual submission is rare. One author describes church people as "sheep that bite." (he must have been thinking of church people in churches other than Mayfair Bible!) / because we spend so much time together, married people tend rub each other the wrong way / and body armor is recommended in some homes because of the battles fought between parents and their children. I had to laugh at what a British diplomat observed after visiting the US. He said, *"I marvel at how well parents in America obey their children!"* / In a union town or any US town for that matter, the least likely place we expect to find mutual submission is the workplace! So the progression of thought moves from the most likely place to find submission to the least likely place. So if it isn't found in the church among believers who individually submit to Christ and to each other it probably won't be found anywhere! That means we need to learn and practice it here. Church should be the place where we learn to submit to Christ and a safe place where learn to submit to each other in love and without risk. The world views the whole concept of submitting to others as naive and dangerous. They fear the ones they submit to will step on their neck. That should never happen in the fellowship of God's people. And that will never happen where God's Spirit is in control.

So church must be the place where we learn and practice what biblical submission is and how it works. We then need to export this spirit of humility and gentleness beyond these walls to our marriages / to our parenting / and to our places of employment. This is God's plan for a society that honors Him and a foretaste of the way things will be in Christ's coming kingdom.

Let's read vs. 5-8 - Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It's estimated that one third of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. Slaves in Greece and Rome were viewed as merchandise like farm implements or beasts of burden. They had no rights and no inheritance. They went where their master took them and did what their master demanded. They jumped when he said "jump!" If they were disobedient, lazy or hard to motivate, they often died at their master's hands without mercy. Do you think the service might be better if Burger King was allowed to practice capital punishment?

While the Bible upholds personal freedom as the ideal, it never condemns any social system...not even totalitarian systems where personal freedom is non-existent. This is shocking to the Western mind. Instead of condemning social systems which come and go, God is concerned to capture the hearts of those who live in these systems. Hearts have to change before systems and ideologies can change and only the Gospel can change hearts. That's our mission. We point men to Christ who alone can change hearts. So don't get all bent out of shape about the dreadful direction our nation is headed. A perfect government is just around the corner. Jesus has promised to return and make all things right. We're called to live in and for His kingdom today! So while slavery is regulated in the Bible, it isn't condemned. Instead, God speaks to the heart of slave and master and spells out the sort of behavior that honors Him. That's the wonder of God's Word. It's trans-cultural. It speaks to people everywhere no matter what social situation they find themselves in. So this AM let's consider God's instructions to workers. Then next Sunday, we'll consider God's Word to those in management.

Now these verses were written to slaves who had come to faith in Christ. Their masters were often unbelieving and merciless. Since this behavior is what God expects of slaves irrespective of how their master treats them, it certainly must apply to employees in a capitalistic system where workers are protected and given many privileges!

1. Do your work with respectful obedience - vs. 5, 6 - as you would obey Christ

Can you remember the difference between the perfect calisthenics you did when the coach or gym teacher was watching and the wimpy ones you did when he/she wasn't looking? (Don't tell me there was no difference, because I know you better than that!) What we did illustrates a term Paul called eye-service or **to win their favor when their eye is on you**.

During my college years I worked for General Roofing and Siding Co. The company was owned and managed by a Christian man named Bob Dean. Bob's heart was as big as his 60" belt length. His generosity and patience was displayed by the way he hired and trained Bible college students to work for him during the summer months. Like every other employer, Bob expected a fair day's work from every employee. And quite honestly...he didn't always get it. His summer crews created a company nickname Bob hated. They called us...."General Goofing and Sliding." Prompted by suspicion, Bob would cruise the neighborhoods in his stealth Cadillac and spy on us from a distance. I'm sure there were times he watched us without our knowing he was there.

But from a rooftop, a crew would occasionally catch a glimpse of Bob peeking between houses and around bushes. The word would pass among the crew. "Hey, the boss is behind the yellow house." On signal, we'd all turn his way, wave and holler, "Hi Bob!" That's something else our boss hated!

Some members of our crew had two working gears...slow and slower...slow when the boss was watching, slower was when he wasn't. But in all seriousness, the poor attitude and lack of energy some Christians bring to their work, is shameful. Eye-service is sneaky working not sincere working. It shows disrespect for those over us and speaks volumes about our character.

We should be thankful slavery is outlawed in our society. Imagine what it was like to be the slave of a cruel master. We have no experience with the severe tests many believing slaves were called to endure. But if the Lord expects slaves to be obedient to their masters, shouldn't employees seek to honor and obey their employers in a system where workers have unprecedented rights and freedoms? Isn't it incumbent upon believers to do our best for the sake of those who write our paychecks and provide us with so many benefits?

Here Paul raised the work ethic to the highest level. As Christians, we're commanded to do what we do out of respect and reverence for the Lord. We're called to extend the same respect and fear we have for the Lord to our employer. We should work with respectful obedience because we're not just working for the man...we're working for the Christ who gave His life to save us and make us His own!" This leads to the second instruction.

2. Do your work with whole-hearted excellence - v. 7 - as though you are serving Christ

I think we all know what it means to do a "half baked job" or to work in a half-hearted way. We've all been there and done that. Many of us have worked beside employees who invest as little effort as possible without getting fired. God has no respect for that kind of work! He sees past our work to our hearts. He knows when our heart isn't engaged. He knows when we're just putting in time.

Andrew Carnegie once said, *"The average person puts only 25% of his energy and ability into his work. The world takes off its hat to those who put in more than 50% of their capacity, and stands on its head for those few and far between souls who devote 100%."*

Here again, there's no dichotomy. The division between secular work and "Christian work" is artificial and misleading. Notice again **v. 7** says - **Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men...** This was written to rank and file believers. If you happen to be a dishwasher, work at it with all your heart...make your employer's dishes sparkle. If you're a carpenter or bricklayer, make excellence your goal...put all your skills into every project. If you're an engineer or designer, put your best efforts into every design. These commands apply to pastors and missionaries and to all who serve in the Christ's church. Each of us is commanded to do our work with whole hearted excellence.

Like **v.6, v.7** asks us to look past our employer to see Jesus who oversees all our work. What energy, effort, and enthusiasm would we invest if we were working for Him? But here's the thing...we are working for Him! Since we invited Christ to be the Lord of our lives, everything we do and say should be done to please and glorify Him. He observes everything we do. We are privileged to do our best on earth for the perfect Master in heaven.

The companion verse to **v. 7** is **Col. 3:23 - Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.** At the end of each workday we should be able to say, "Lord, I worked for you today...I obeyed my employer and did my work with excellence as an offering to You."

I want to say something else and I hope you'll understand my heart if my words don't say it fairly. So much done in the name of Christian service is half-baked and sub-standard. So often the Lord is given our leftovers...left over time...surplus energy...extra money. If the Lordship of Christ means anything at all, these offerings are backwards. Who serves leftovers to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? How did our priorities get so upside down and backwards? We tend to be lavish when doing for ourselves, but cheapskates when it comes to doing for God.

King David modeled an important principle when he purchased Araunah's threshing floor on Mt. Moriah. This rock threshing floor was the very spot where Abraham offered Isaac centuries earlier and the ground the Jewish Temple was eventually built on. Araunah wanted to donate the place to David but the king replied, **"No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them. - II Sam.24:24** We know the Lord was pleased with David's attitude and sacrifice because the next verse says, **David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.**

We might sweat a little to do our work with whole hearted excellence. At the end of the day our muscles might ache / our brains might be wearied. We might have to put in a few extra hours to get it right. But if serving the Lord costs us nothing, that's probably what our work is worth to God and His purposes...nothing!

3. Do your work with anticipation of reward - v.8 - because the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does

By his own admission, Dr. Emerson Eggerichs calls it a lousy illustration, but he uses it anyway. Since I haven't been able to come up with anything better, I like to borrow it. He asks his audience to imagine a host of angels working the handle of heaven's reward machine. Every time a Christian does something worthy of reward, the angels get all excited. They're watching you know. "Hey did you see that? Wasn't that great? He helped that guy out with no thought of pay. He went the extra mile. He did that job with excellence. "Squealing with delight, the angels yank the handle and it goes, "cha-ching!" By their action in heaven, something of value is credited to that believer's eternal account. I can't tell you what that something is because the Bible doesn't tell us. But something of value is credited and it's something worth living and dying for! Just wait and see!

I'm pretty sure there's no mechanical reward gizmo in Heaven. But something does happen when we work sincerely and whole-heartedly as to the Lord. We lay up treasure. A transaction of eternal significance occurs whenever our attitudes, words, and works honor Christ. Nothing worthy of reward escapes Heaven's notice. Dr. Eggerichs says, "Nothing done on earth is wasted!" **Matt. 16:27 - For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Heb.6:10 says, God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.**

Let me ask, is it wrong to set aside a portion of your income for retirement years? No! It's a matter of good stewardship. But what about eternity? Is it wrong to be intentional about laying up treasures in Heaven for the life to come? Of course not! In fact, we're commanded to send our treasures up there instead of storing them down here. Are you doing that? Anticipation of reward may not be the highest motivation, but there's nothing wrong or selfish about serving well for the reward to come. It's really a matter of wise stewardship.

Whether cha-ching resonates through Heaven or not, something can be credited to our account everyday. The fact that we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ should motivate us to serve with anticipation and expectancy.

Aside from the future rewards Christ has promised, believers shouldn't forfeit the rewards offered for good work here and now. As we work with excellence as to the Lord, our reputation and testimony is enhanced and strengthened. A good reputation in a workplace can lead to promotion and increased pay. But more significant than these incentives, a good reputation earns us the right to speak others about the forgiveness and the new life Christ has given us.

This AM I've asked Mike Shustock to share his testimony. Mike was introduced to Christ through the persistent efforts of some Christian co-workers in one of our GM shops. I seriously doubt if these guys would have had much credibility if they were unreliable workers. I doubt if they would have gained Mike's attention if their job performance was shoddy and substandard. So, Mike, come and tell us your story.