

## EPHESIANS – FACT SHEET 9



### **From Church to Home to Work:**

For many, they have a ‘theology of work’ that points back to the fall, that first act of rebellion and disobedience in the garden of Eden, when following the sin of Adam and Eve, God had pronounced that, ‘..cursed is the ground because of you, through *painful toil* you will eat of it’ (Gen 3:17ff). With this backcloth, it is easy to see our everyday work as a ‘punishment’, a painful consequence of sin. However, such an approach would be misplaced and damaging, as when one looks at the initial introduction of ‘work’ by God, it appears as part of His original ordained plan and order for man. The pre-fall narrative of Genesis 2 tells us, ‘..the Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it’ (Gen 2:15). Without a doubt, everything, including our daily work, has been tainted and twisted by sin; but knowing that our ‘work’ is within God’s restorative plan, puts a whole new perspective on it.

The ‘umbrella’ verses of Ephesians 5:18 & 21 have brought our perspective and challenge to be ‘filled with the Spirit’ and to ‘submit to one another’. The Apostle then outlines three situations, renowned for stress and difficulty, where such a Godly quality and approach is needed – in our marriages, our families (looked at last week) and also our work.

In addition to God’s ‘new society’ taking their ‘new standards’ into their homes; the Apostle Paul now moves the conversation from ‘new relationships’ in our marriages and families, to ‘new relationships’ within our work places. Remembering God’s ‘big picture’ to ‘bring all things together under one head, even Christ’ (Eph 1:10), to bring all things back to His created order, this includes our work.

To emphasise the incredible potential of the transforming power of God in work relationships, Paul uses the most extreme example of ‘slaves and masters’ – both of whom would have been in his congregations. If the Lord could transform this most Godless, strained, one sided, often brutal type of employee/employer relationship – then He can certainly work in our situation.

## Chapter 6: 5-9

### Slaves: Verses 5-8

Just as children are commanded to 'obey' their parents – so here slaves are commanded to do the same with regards their earthly Masters (verse 5). The incentive for slaves is the same as the child – behind the authority, they are to see Christ. In Colossians, the Apostle tells us, 'For it is Christ you are serving' (Col 3:24). In fact within these four verses of instruction to slaves, the Apostle points to Christ in each one:

- '..obey Christ' – vs 5
- '..slaves of Christ..' – vs 6
- '..serving the Lord..' – vs7
- '..the Lord will reward' – vs8

One could say that their approach to their bosses should totally be 'Christ centred'. Paul 'liberates' the slaves in Christ, as he reminds them that they are now serving, not just mere men, but the King of Kings. They have a 'higher calling', to do the 'will of God' (verse 6). The Apostle then highlights the four fold approach of the believing worker: One who serves:

- With 'respect and fear' (vs 5) – a reverent acknowledgement of the Lord's authority behind those we serve;
- With sincerity (vs 5) – without ulterior motives;
- Conscientiously (vs 6) – not 'just to impress' when we are being watched, but always in the light of the constant watchful eye of Christ;
- With willing and cheerful hearts (vs 6);
- Ultimately to be rewarded from the Lord (vs 8)

### Masters: Verse 9

Whilst Paul instructs the slaves with four verses, he addresses the Masters with only one – but one loaded verse. If Masters wish to have servants that behave in such a way as detailed above, then they must behave, 'in the same way' (vs 9). Peter used the same picture when instructing Elders, instructing them not to 'Lord it over' those under their care but rather to 'lead by example' (1 Peter 5:3).

The Apostle gives believing leaders three principles for demonstrating God's transforming power in the workplace:

- 'Do the same to them' (vs 9) – if you want to receive respect, show it!
- 'Do NOT threaten' (vs 9) – as parents are not to exasperate their children, Masters are not to use threats to exercise control;
- Remember that you both have the same ultimate boss (vs 9) – the Lord, the impartial, heavenly Judge

These few verses in Ephesians 6, demonstrate what the transforming power of God, through His Holy Spirit, can do with those who are open to 'be filled' and who are willing 'to submit to one another'. Marriages, families and our workplaces would be transformed places if we would only let Him do His work within us.

Within our workplace – be that as a home maker, a student, an employee or a boss – it all starts with our 'theology of work'. We can either see our 'day to day' as a daily drudge as a result of the fall – or as part of God's original created order, which He is working to restore.

### **Further Study:**

**Exercise for Fun:** As the Creator of work, God Himself demonstrates varying skills and qualities in the creation narratives of Genesis 1 & 2. If this was a 'work project' what roles could you see within these chapters – ie Artist, Project Manager...?

**Other Passages to consider: Colossians 3, Philemon (note the transformation from mere slave to 'brother' – see verse 16)**

### **Why doesn't the NT criticise Slavery?**

- The NT neither criticise nor condone;
- It's not the 'servitude' that is wrong – both Jesus and the Apostle Paul promoted servanthood (Phil 2:7, John 13:14-16, 1 Cor 9:11, 2 Cor 4:5);
- Christianity had no political 'clout' at the time – though at time of writing (AD60) – there was a turning of opinion and conditions for slaves;
- The whole economy was dependant upon it (60 million slaves within the Roman empire) – had slavery been 'instantly abolished' – there would have been huge numbers of unemployed and widespread poverty
- The Gospel did indeed light a 'fuse of change' – but was a very slow burning one – the 'explosion' of abolition took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century through Godly men like William Wilberforce ( a good old Hull boy!)

**This all said, slavery, the de-humanisation of an individual, has got to be one of the worst evidences of the depth of sin and godlessness that the fall initiated. The 'owning' of another human being created in Gods image is evidence enough of a twisted world's need for redemption.**

***"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word" Psalm 119:18***