

Living as the People of God in the Workplace

A Workshop on Faith and Work

Sermon Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life 9 November 2007

Revelation 1:6

Ephesians 6:6-8

Genesis 2:15

Colossians 3:23-25

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

Matthew 16:26

Luke 12:20

Ephesians 6:4

Ephesians 5:21

Ephesians 6:5-9

Acts 4:19

Mark 10:44

Matthew 22:39

Lord, we affirm:

You are the Lord of the workplace as well as the worship place.

All work that meets legitimate needs is Your work, to be done in Your way.

Prosperity that comes from our work is a gift from You, to be used for Your glory, not our ease.

While You made all things for us to enjoy, true satisfaction comes only from You.

Lord, we confess:

We have at times been proud and arrogant about success, thinking it was because we were smarter, better, or worked harder than others.

We have sometimes placed success above integrity, and power above people. This is sin in every instance.

We have often let our love of prosperity quench our courage and compassion.

We have kept You too often at a safe distance, mentally locked within the church building, away from our daily affairs. How we could have used Your strength, guidance and love at times, had we only known that You are as real a part of our lives on Monday as You are on Sunday.

Lord, we ask that:

We, as businessmen, executives and workmen and women, would live ethically distinctive lives, both publicly and privately.

We would assume the discipline of craftsmanship, working with all our heart as if You were our employer — because You are.

We would discover what we are each gifted to do, finding the delight and joy of doing what You created us for.

Others would see the reality of Your presence in our lives, and be attracted to You.

Preamble

Our discussion this morning could range widely, but I mean to take up only a few of the topics that seem to me most important for us in our present circumstances, given the time we have.

The Backdrop

Had we not been arrested by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the blood He shed for us on the cross, by His single sacrifice to end all sacrifices, to redeem us, we would have continued as servants of sin and slaves to our body and fleshly desires. Having thus been redeemed, we need to conduct ourselves in society in a manner worthy of the redemption granted to us by His grace.

If we accept this statement as true, we must then be prepared to extend Christian values to our workplace, irrespective of whether we are employers or employees.

I. Reconciling Our Spiritual and Secular Existence

None of us genuinely live two separate lives, one at worship and another everywhere else — no more than a single person can truly be two different people at once. It follows, then, that we cannot behave one way in church and another altogether at our workplace.

Is it true that our spiritual existence does not mix with the everyday world? It is, sadly enough, the mindset of many in our world today, even amongst most Christians, that our spiritual existence does not mix with the everyday world of the workplace. "What happens on Monday has no relationship to what took place on Sunday," they say. These are thoughts expressed often enough in our day and time, although rarely put in such direct terms. Let us return to this idea in a little while.

The Divide: Full-Time and Part-Time Christian Service. This divide probably arose much earlier in history, with the concept of "full-time Christian service" — as though those who are not clergy by vocation, or who do not work for Christian organisations, were only part-time in the service of Christ. It may have been true to some extent in those days, centuries ago. It is no longer true in the present time, though we find the concept very convenient, especially in view of the much talked-about globalisation and the fast-changing marketplace and work environment. Pastors, bishops and ministers who have chosen "full-time" Christian service as their vocation are also required to interact intensively with the marketplace. They too go to banks to carry out financial transactions, for themselves and for the church; they travel, going through all the intricacies involved, just as laypeople do; they buy things at the shops; they deal with various commercial organisations,

just as any layperson would. Can we say that they set aside their spiritual orientation and behave differently while doing all that? The answer is that, by and large, they hold to Christian values, irrespective of where they are and what they are doing.

Jesus and His Disciples. When Jesus came to earth, He came as a carpenter — a man given to work with His hands, and to provide an honest service to His fellow men. He did not come as a priest, although He was both a King and a Priest (Revelation 1:6, KJV). When it came time to recruit those through whom the church would be founded, He chose twelve men from the marketplace — fishermen, a tax collector, and so on. Interestingly enough, none of His disciples were priests in the Jewish temple, the natural place to recruit from had He been starting a religious movement in the ordinary way. Was it any accident that Jesus called men from the marketplace to play such a vital role in His mission? I am sure none of us think so.

God Himself as a Workman in His Creation. When God created the earth, He demonstrated something right at the outset to human beings: He believed in work. He was, above all else, the Master Creator — an artist, a designer, a strategic planner, an organiser, a project developer, an assessor, a zoologist, a biologist, a chemist, a linguist, a materials specialist, an engineer, and a waste-management technician. His work did not end when He created man; that was only the beginning of His continued care for mankind. Whether we call our work "spiritual" or "secular," all legitimate work reflects the activity of God.

God is honoured when we work with the goal of reflecting Him through our life and work. So why, and how, did society begin to draw a line of separation between faith and work?

Our First Task Is Not Simply to Renounce Our Former Secular Life. As Christians we hold a different attitude towards misfortune, failure, sickness, slander, material benefit, riches, poverty and honour. We have a different understanding of human existence. Our first task is not simply to renounce our former secular life, but to develop and cultivate an inner life too. When we turn our attention to the inner man, to the needs of our soul, God teaches us and shows us how to live in the secular world around us. We must, therefore, put all our energies into developing a spiritual life.

Acting as Responsible Workmen in the Various Arenas God Has Entrusted to Us. The remedy is not for laypeople to be trained to carry out Christian ministry at the workplace, mainly because they have their own "ministry" to accomplish, and this is not necessarily the same, nor does it require the same skills. An architect, an accountant, a doctor, a business executive, a software programmer, or a designer who undertakes to do his work to the glory of God — who works with integrity, diligence, fairness and excellence, who treats his wife with the

love Christ has for the church, who raises his children in godly wisdom and instruction, who urges non-Christian colleagues and associates to heed the gospel message — in short, who acts as a responsible workman in whatever arena God has entrusted to him, will receive eternal praise from God. That is what really matters in eternity. In short, God's interest is not simply that we carry out holy activities, but that we become holy people.

God Allows Us to Develop Specific Skills and Talents for His Purposes.

We must understand that God takes us through the process of life, and allows us to develop specific skills and talents for His purposes. The marketplace is where many of us have the greatest opportunity to display these gifts. God gives each of us talents to achieve the things He wants us to achieve. Not all of us, however, become chief executives, or highly successful by the world's reckoning. Some of us have been called to use our talents to serve others, for the benefit of the kingdom of God. The workplace is a training ground for most of us. It is where we deal with the everyday challenges of life, but it is also there that God wants to reveal His glory, "so that the world might know that He is God." Someone once said that we will hold many "jobs" before we come into the "primary" calling God has for our life. I have seen this principle at work.

Incidentally, business organisations might do well to permit employees who are so inclined to serve as another kind of chief executive — not one concerned with finance or operations, but a chief encouragement officer, or a chief compassion officer. The need of the hour is to spread Christian values amongst all sections of people in the marketplace.

Everything We Do Should Be for the Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians chapter 6, Paul says:

"Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." — Ephesians 6:6-8 (KJV)

According to Paul, all of us are in the full-time service of the Lord, for we are all working as unto Christ. All that we do should be for the Lord Jesus Christ; it should be to His glory. We should step back for a moment and remind ourselves again that each of us is called, first and foremost, to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. From this position all else follows. The fruit of our relationship with Christ moves us to the level of our calling in work. That work — whether serving on the mission field, or delivering the post — is a holy calling of God. The lowest task, however humble, becomes a love song of praise to the Lord Jesus when we do it as unto Him.

The Remedy. We must realise that in every single breath we breathe we can know the presence of God in our life, if our primary focus is on Him. God values our work even when its product has no eternal value in itself. It is a fine balancing act, an act of dovetailing our secular responsibilities with our submission, reverence and obedience to our Lord. Can anything at all be done unless we have His blessing? We have only one choice: to live and work to His glory. We cannot divide our lives into spiritual and secular elements.

How do we do this?

- First, we must invite Jesus into our lives.
- We must urge Him to walk with us and be with us wherever we are, seeking His guidance in everything we do.
- We must establish a personal relationship with Him, in which we are able to commune with Him at all times.
- We must acknowledge Him in everything we do.
- We must learn His teachings clearly, understanding their meaning and purpose.
- We must take these teachings within us, and apply them in everything we do.

When we try to balance our working life with our spiritual life, we must understand that the two cannot be equal in the way the word "balance" would ordinarily suggest. In setting our priorities, obedience to our Lord must be placed at the very top, and everything else must come well below it.

Let me offer an illustration — one whose telling has passed through many hands over the years, and whose substance may already be familiar to some of you.

There was once a man who spent his whole working life, some forty years of it, as the caretaker of a large company. He was never promoted, never had anyone reporting to him, and never accumulated much by the world's measure — no house of his own, no car, no investments to speak of. But he took a quiet pride in his work. Every surface he was responsible for gleamed; every window shone; every carpet was kept spotless. Colleagues would sometimes find him on his knees with a toothbrush, working at some awkward corner the mop could never reach. Whatever the day brought, he met it with a ready smile and a cheerful word for everyone he passed, and in all his years there, not one person could recall ever hearing him complain.

Now and then a colleague would ask him why he troubled himself so much over a job that asked so little of him. His answer was always the same: he was doing the work for the Lord Jesus, he would say, and for Jesus nothing but his best would do — Jesus was his closest friend, and

he owed Him everything. Some who heard this laughed it off; others walked on without comment; but a few would stop and ask him, half in curiosity and half in doubt, how Jesus could be anyone's friend in that way. Whenever that happened, the caretaker's face would light up, and he was never too busy to tell them.

There was another man who began work at the very same company, on the very same day as the caretaker. He, too, worked there for forty years, but his path could not have looked more different. A capable graduate, hard-working and quick, he joined the firm as a salesman and rose without pause — sales manager, regional manager, and finally the youngest person ever to lead the company as its chief executive. Under his direction the firm grew into an international name in its field, absorbing smaller companies and prospering wherever he turned his hand.

His success brought him wide recognition. He was asked to address conferences, to sit on university and civic boards, and his fellow executives would come to him for advice. He always gave the same answer: that his success had come through hard work and the opportunities set before him, and that anyone prepared to give their all could do the same. He and his family were seen at church without fail each Sunday, seated in their accustomed place — respected, admired, and altogether presentable.

As a young man, his father had once told him that business was no place for either religion or politics — the two, he said, did not mix, any more than oil and water. He never thought to question this, though something in him always felt it was not quite right. And so he let the matter rest. Between the company, the holiday home, the golf club, and the effort of fitting family time around board meetings, the years slipped by, and God was steadily crowded out of what little space remained.

Both men died on the same day. And, as the Scriptures tell us each of us must (1 Corinthians 3:11), each in turn came to stand before the Lord and give an account of his life.

The chief executive went first. The Lord placed a hand upon his shoulder and told him he had done well with what he had been given — that he had worked hard, and made good use of every opportunity set before him. But, the Lord told him, all that he had built must remain behind: his houses, his cars, his company and his clubs had been good things in their place, but they had no part in His kingdom. The university he had loved and served had never honoured Him, and it would burn away and be destroyed. His wealth was of no use here. He had, the Lord said, laboured long and hard, but not wisely — he had gained the good, but had missed the best.

The caretaker stood some way off, watching all this with a fearful,

humble heart. If even the chief executive had received no commendation, what hope, he thought, could there be for a mere caretaker? His eyes were fixed on the ground, and tears ran down his face, when he felt the Lord's hands rest upon his own shoulders.

"Lift up your eyes, My son," the Lord said. The caretaker looked up into the face of the One he loved, and the warmth of that smile went through him like a shock of joy. "Turn round," the Lord told him, "and tell Me what you see."

With the Lord's arm still about his shoulders, the caretaker turned, and saw, coming towards him, a great crowd of joyful people, their faces lit with a happiness he had never seen the like of.

"Lord," he said, "I recognise only a few of these. Who are the rest?"

"Those you recognise," the Lord answered, "are the ones to whom you spoke of My love. The others are the ones they, in turn, told. They have come to thank you. Enter now into the joy that has been kept for you since the foundation of the world."

And the angels, we are told, sang for joy as the caretaker was welcomed home among the friends his own quiet witness had won.

Both men, you see, had been given their opportunities, just as you and I have been given ours. One built a fortune that could not last; the other, one that will never fade. Both were the fruit of choices made day by day. The question worth asking ourselves is simply this: which fortune are we labouring to build?

Here are a few Scriptures relevant to this context:

"And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." — Genesis 2:15 (KJV)

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." — Colossians 3:23-25 (KJV)

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." — 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 (KJV)

II. Profession or Obsession?

Most of us are very successful in our profession, work or business — this applies also, in retrospect, to those of us who are now retired from active work. We see highly successful people all around us. The media applauds such people almost daily. We have instituted prestigious awards for "business person of the year" and the like. Let me paint a picture of such a person, so that we may more easily introspect and see whether we fit the description.

The Symptoms. He or she:

- is a perfectionist — neat, clean, orderly, dutiful and meticulous;
- is punctual, persistent and reliable;
- works hard, and is good at tasks that require intense concentration;
- is extremely competitive, and needs to be in constant control of self and of those close to him or her;
- is extraordinarily self-willed, and despises indecisiveness in self and others;
- has unrealistic expectations of self and everyone else, and avoids recognising his or her own fallibility;
- in marriage, is careful to do the minimum share, yet tries to do most of the thinking for the spouse, and is sparing with love and time;
- has an overly strict conscience and rigid thinking, and often appears cold and intimidating;
- expresses anger more readily than warmth, since anger encourages distance in relationships;
- generally keeps feelings private, and attempts to intellectualise rather than feel;
- frequently makes personal accomplishments the subject of conversation.

The Diagnosis. These attributes, though recognised as qualities befitting a successful person, are nothing but the symptoms of the illness we might call "workaholism."

The Wisdom of the Lord Jesus. Over twenty centuries ago, Jesus asked His disciples a question that continues to challenge the minds of thoughtful men and women:

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" — Matthew 16:26 (KJV)

Our Lord reveals wisdom far beyond the wisdom of this world, and an unparalleled comprehension of both economics and human values. With it, Jesus cut to the core of man's quest for meaning, fulfilment, security

and prosperity.

It is as if, for a moment, Jesus decided to speak the language of the marketplace. "Let us talk business," He might say. "Let us talk profitability, bottom lines, net gains — whatever you wish. I am prepared. But let Me ask the first question. Is it good business to spend thirty-five years capturing all this world has to give, only to lose your very soul for eternity? Does that make sense? Think about it. What will your high achievements, your prestigious positions, your money and your power do for you when your allotted days on earth are spent?" Jesus takes the thought further still: "Let us talk trade — values and comparisons. You have one soul. Is there anything worth trading it for?"

These are profound, even haunting, words. Jesus seems to imply that there is a frequent connection between "gaining the world," whatever that means to us, and neglecting the greater issues of eternity. We cannot have it all. Conquering the world is not easy; it may demand a high price, even our soul.

With untiring effort and unwavering determination, we can achieve great success in this world. But it will cost something. For many people it will cost their health — hypertension has long been called the secret killer of successful people across the world, and high blood pressure and heart attacks claim the lives of scores of success-seekers who have no time to care properly for their bodies. For others it will cost their marriages and their families; we need only look at the divorce rate among professionals to see the truth of this.

The Effects. The price is indeed high. But Jesus says that this is only the beginning. The loss of health, marriage and family is tragic; but infinitely more tragic still is the loss of one's soul for eternity.

The Parable of the Rich, Successful Man. Luke chapter 12 records Jesus' parable of the rich fool. He was so prosperous that he had to build additional storage for his goods, and having achieved all this, he decided to take his ease for the rest of his life, eating, drinking and making merry — a false sense of security. But the story did not end according to his plans.

"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" — Luke 12:20 (KJV)

He learned in an instant that the work of his hands held no guarantee of future security, nor eased his way into the life to come. Handing the fruit of his labours over to those who followed him, he was forced to face God with empty hands and an empty heart.

Jesus ended the parable with words we might paraphrase thus: "You

made a bad decision. It was no sin to build bigger barns, but it was the ultimate absurdity to neglect your soul. What a shame that you never took the time to contemplate eternity, and to establish for yourself a treasure that honours God and lasts for ever."

A Foolish Choice. It is astonishing that otherwise responsible men and women continue to make this same foolish choice. Even people who profess to be Christians persist in their attempts to gain the whole world, while, day by day, they experience the disintegration of their health, their marriages, their children and their spiritual lives.

A Faulty Thought Process. Why do people continue in this way? Why did I do so myself, for so many years? What drove me to "build my kingdom," while risking my own health, marriage, children and spiritual life? All this comes of the faulty thought processes in our minds, through which we develop a dependence on overwork that has a marked adverse effect on the rest of our lives. We may find this statement difficult to accept, but it has been shown to be true by a great many studies.

Insecurity. Most people think that workaholics are driven by a desire to acquire more and more money, but in the majority of cases this is not true. Most who study the subject agree that workaholics are driven not by greed, but by a deep-seated personal insecurity.

Generally speaking, this insecurity has its roots in childhood. As a child, he or she received too little encouragement, praise and approval from parents, teachers and others around him or her. Regardless of how well the child performed at school, in plays, in sport and so on, it never seemed to be quite good enough. Parents and teachers were never satisfied; they always made the child feel that he or she "could have done better." The child, therefore, grew up believing that anything short of perfection was failure.

God Wants Us to Work Diligently. It is true that we are called by God to work hard and carefully, but we are never called to work so hard that we neglect the basic responsibilities of family life. The children of workaholics may have their toys, bikes, trips, cars and generous allowances, but they are denied what they crave the most: time and love.

It is remarkable how often older adults speak of the "confused and irresponsible" young people of today. A little introspection will tell us why they are as they are. Many children are driven to rebellious and irresponsible behaviour as a last resort, in an attempt to gain the attention they crave — a longing to feel some sense of commitment from their parents. When they do not receive it, they experience anger, provoked by a father or mother unwilling to take the time to love them.

The apostle Paul admonishes:

"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." — Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

It takes a commitment of time and emotional effort to show our children that we love them, and to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. There is no other way to be obedient to the word of God.

The Remedy. Non-Christian experts offer a whole range of options to the workaholic who wishes to change, from dropping out of the marketplace altogether to attending therapy groups for workaholics. There may be some merit in these suggestions, but I believe the Bible offers a far more fundamental, and therefore more effective, way to address workaholism.

God's Love Is Not Conditional. The first thing a workaholic needs to know is that God's love is not conditional. We do not have to earn it. Our Lord's love is not based on our performance, our perfection, or even our good works.

Mary and Martha. Remember Mary and Martha, who had the privilege of welcoming Jesus into their home? Mary was overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord, and devoted herself to His teaching. Martha, on the other hand, devoted herself to elaborate preparations, which demanded all her time and energy. She wanted to prove to Jesus, by the sheer quantity of her work, that she was worthy of His approval and deserving of His love. Jesus, however, saw straight through her frantic efforts to the insecurity that festered in her heart. "Martha, Martha," He said, "you do not have to prove your worth to Me. I love you just as you are. Come, sit down. Share your time with Me, and listen to My words" (my paraphrase of Luke 10:41-42).

Spouses of Workaholics. In addition to learning that God loves him, the workaholic must learn that others love and accept him too. The wife of a workaholic must affirm her love for him, and express appreciation for his good qualities. She must be patient with his faults, understanding that they stem from a deep insecurity. She must learn to reinforce, positively, whatever in him is not work-related, and gently persuade him that it is he, not his money or his accomplishments, whom she values most. At the same time, she must show reasonable appreciation for the material things he gives her, since this may be the only way he knows how to show love — to reject them would be to reject his love. She must also learn to communicate her own needs and opinions in an honest, God-honouring way, one that will gradually and gently encourage the genuine intimacy so crucial to a good marriage.

The Divide Between Our Spiritual and Secular Lives. In the previous section we tried to demolish the divide between our spiritual and secular lives. The cure for workaholism lies in this very reconciliation.

In every breath we breathe, in every single thought of our mind, we need to acknowledge our Lord. Whatever we do in our day-to-day lives, we do it as unto Him. This realisation shifts the focus, from attempting to satisfy our worldly desires and our own egos, to doing the will of our Lord God. It is a fine balancing act, almost a skill, which we must develop. As we have seen, we are not two different people, nor do we have two lives to live. Our workplace is nothing but a natural extension of the rest of our life.

III. Christian Employer and Employee Relationships

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, is the best place to learn about this relationship. In chapter 6, in just five verses (5 to 9), he packs in the entire spectrum of employer and employee relationships. This was, perhaps, the earliest lesson in human resource management, centuries before Henry Ford's initiatives in personnel management.

Let us refresh our minds by reading these five verses:

"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him." — Ephesians 6:5-9 (KJV)

Employers or employees, all of us are servants of one Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, and everything else we do should bear this in mind. I am not a human resources specialist, but I feel strongly that people hate to be "managed" by others; people need to be empowered to carry out their duties with greater efficiency. Paul, in just five verses, ties up the entire spectrum of human resource management.

Let us look at the operative terms in this passage:

1. God's will for employees (verses 5-8). Employees should discharge their responsibilities:
 - obediently (verse 5);
 - spiritually (verses 5-6);
 - gladly (verse 7);
 - rewardingly (verse 8).
2. God's will for employers (verse 9). Employers should treat their employees:

- with reciprocation;
- without threats;
- under Christ's lordship;
- impartially.

Let us now take a closer look at each of these operative terms.

Obedience. In chapter 5, verse 21, Paul says: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21, KJV). We have looked at wives, who must submit to their husbands, and at children, who must submit to their parents. We now look at employees, who must submit to their employers — the same theme carried through once again.

In verse 5, Paul says, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh." This principle of obedience applies to more than employees alone; it applies, as we have seen, to the husband-and-wife relationship, the parent-and-child relationship, and perhaps to every other relationship besides.

The term "obedience" refers to continuous, uninterrupted submission to one's earthly master or employer, the only exception being a command that would involve disobedience to God's word. We read in Acts chapter 4, verse 19:

"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." — Acts 4:19 (KJV)

No obedience, therefore, can be in violation of, or in contradiction to, our obedience to God.

An employer is a master according to the flesh, and Paul still says: obey him, "with fear and trembling." However, this is not a servile fear, an abject terror, or a trembling in one's boots; it is not, as Paul would have it, blind and unthinking compliance. It is a dutiful respect — an honouring of a boss, of his position and his authority — and it should be a reverent respect that honours the position of the employer.

Spiritually. An employer cannot govern the conscience; he cannot tell us what to believe or what not to believe, nor how to carry out our religious convictions. Yet obedience, as an employee, is spiritually possible. Paul says in verse 5, "as unto Christ" — that is the only way in which we can truly respect our employer: by being obedient spiritually. Our employment has to be unto Christ. What Paul meant was that even our work, our most menial task, whatever it may be, is a work done for Christ, if it is good work.

The divide we discussed earlier comes up again here. According to Paul,

we are all in the full-time service of the Lord, for we are all working as unto Christ. All that we do should be for the Lord Jesus Christ; it should be to His glory.

We must realise that in every moment of every day we can know the presence of God in our life, if our primary focus is on Him — if we set aside every other thought and concentrate on Him alone. It is a fine balancing act, an act of dovetailing our earthly duties and responsibilities with our submission, reverence and obedience to our Lord. Can anything at all be done unless we have His blessing?

Gladly. Paul goes on, in verse 6, to say: "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers." We might translate "eyeservice" as "eye-slaves." How many of us are sincere and diligent enough to discharge our responsibilities entirely unsupervised? Most of us watch every move of the boss, and relax or neglect the task at hand the moment his back is turned. We forget that there is an all-seeing Master, One who sees everything, all-knowing, all-wise, almighty, and always watching. Can we possibly escape His watchfulness?

It is said that a Christian's standard of performance should never vary according to the geographical location of the manager or supervisor. The Lord has no use, and no place, for lazy people. Indeed, that is what the parable of the talents tells us: the servant who did nothing, and buried his master's talent in his absence, was told by the master, "Thou wicked and slothful servant."

It is possible for a housewife to cook a dinner as if the Lord were going to dine with the family that night. It is possible for the teacher to educate children, for doctors and nurses to treat patients, for solicitors to help clients, for accountants to audit books, for secretaries to type letters, for shop assistants to serve the public, for builders to build buildings, for refuse collectors to empty bins, all to the glory and service of the Lord. It is a matter of attitude. The key to the right attitude towards work is knowing that we are doing it "as unto the Lord." Do we work with a sincere desire to please Him? That is what makes a day's work a holy sacrament, an act of sacred worship, to go out to our work in the morning and do it diligently and honestly, acknowledging our Lord at every breath. It would bring untold glory to His name.

Rewardingly. Obedience is to be given by the employee rewardingly. The main incentive is not the reward, but the glorifying of the Lord, and being as unto Him. The outcome will be that, for every good work we do as unto the Lord, God will reward us. He does not reward us with status or with money, but He rewards us when we do work that is unpleasant, that is not enjoyable, that deep down annoys us in some way — yet we still bring ourselves to do it as unto the Lord, respectfully, sincerely, honestly, spiritually and gladly. Do it rewardingly, and He will reward

us. What is done for Him, He always rewards.

Masters. We have already seen that Christianity does not change social distinctions; it changes the heart. It is a change that becomes visible around us, and, in the present context, it changes the responsibility of masters towards their servants.

Reciprocate. How do we guard against violence on the shop floor, shouting in the office, ulcers in the stomach, and nervous breakdowns on our medical records? The answer is: follow Ephesians. As a Christian, if you are a boss, do as your employees would have you do. Look at verse 9: "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him." Do as the employees would do to you.

This mutuality runs throughout all these relationships. First, the husband and the wife: "Wives, obey your husbands in the Lord," but then there is the reciprocal love of the husband, who must submit to the wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord," but then, "parents, provoke not your children to wrath" — a mutual responsibility of love runs throughout. And so it is here also: employees are to obey their employers in the Lord, and employers are to do the same. It is not one-upmanship; it is not a dictatorship; it is doing as we would have them do unto us. Treat them as we would wish to be treated as an employer, and do not exploit them. The entire concept flows from our Lord's five words: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (compare Matthew 22:39, KJV).

Without Threats. Christian masters rule without threats. Look again at verse 9: "forbearing threatening" — that is, to be enduring, and not threatening. Paul is warning us: no bullying behaviour; do not behave like an arrogant overlord.

Let me offer a short illustration:

"I see you were last employed by a psychiatrist," said a prospective employer to an applicant. "Why did you leave that position?"

"Well," she replied, "I simply could not win. If I was late for work, I was hostile. If I was early, I had an anxiety complex. If I was on time, I was compulsive."

Employers use various means to intimidate their employees, simply to assert a superiority which, in truth, does not exist.

Under Lordship. Christian masters or bosses must always remember that they are not the final authority — that they, too, have a Master, one in heaven, and that they are His slaves and His servants. Whatever the relationship in the workplace, there is a spiritual equity between employer and employed; both are spiritual equals in the sight of God.

The employer as well as the employed will both answer to God in the end; the servant and the master will both give an account to God on the same level. There is no class distinction in the eyes of our Lord.

Consider the sanctifying influence this would bring to the workplace, and the impact upon our employees, or upon our employers, once we come to see God as our final Judge. If we are employers, it means we shall pay our people their wages, care for them even in their afflictions and their illnesses, and be concerned for their families' welfare — this, let me say, is true socialism. True socialism is not the abolition of distinctions, but the levelling of all men under Christ. Ultimately, this whole passage might be summed up in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the rule by which He lived His own life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (compare Mark 10:44, KJV). A good master on earth will be a servant of heaven.

Impartiality. Christian masters rule impartially. There is equity before God in the judgement, when we all stand before that great white throne. When we stand before the judgement seat of Christ, we are all equal.

In conclusion, let me say this: for employees and employers alike, there is no other option. There is no distinction between the secular world and the spiritual. Think of the impact it would have, were we all to live as we should. The point of this whole passage, as we have seen, is simply this: be filled with the Spirit — for if we are filled with the Spirit, we shall do all things for the glory of God.