

Work

1 Peter 2:18-25

There's a thread on Reddit where people answer the question, "What's the laziest thing you've ever done?" Some of the answers are pure gold.

- Called the restaurant to send the waiter back to my table.
- Shot 10 Nerf darts at my light switch from bed. Missed all of them and slept with the lights on.
- I downloaded a movie instead of going upstairs to grab the DVD.
- I tried to skip to the good part of a 33 second YouTube video.
- Had the pizza guy deliver a pizza. I lived above the pizzeria.
- I had a package that was wrapped in cellophane. I didn't want to get up and grab my scissors, so I grabbed my cat lying next to me and used his claws to rip the plastic. The cat didn't care.
- Attached my dog's leash to my remote control car and walked her around the cul-de-sac all from the comfort of my living room.
- I purchased a 1000 pack of disposable plates and cutlery, because I hate doing dishes.
- Not me, but a buddy of mine was lying in bed one morning. Picked his nose and had nowhere to put it, so he put it back in his nose.

Okay some of these people are simply lazy, but I got to say some of these are prime examples of work smarter, not harder. We want to talk this morning about work, and what God has to say about our work.

In 1 Peter, the apostle addresses three spheres of influence in the world HERE where we as Christians can ultimately make a difference THERE. The issue Peter is trying to address is this—how do we live godly lives in and ungodly world? First, he addresses the arena of government and citizenship. We looked at this sphere a couple of weeks ago. He looks at the home, and he also addresses the sphere of our work or labor.

How do you live a godly life when you work in the world? How do you live a godly life when you have to deal with bosses, and coworkers, and clients who can be so ungodly?

We might miss Peter's point at first glance, because he puts all of this in the 1st Century context of slaves and masters. So we think this doesn't apply to us; we kind of skim over it. Maybe this makes us uncomfortable, so we avoid it.

Remember, Peter is writing to a group of Christians that from a worldly point of view, HERE, were stuck on the bottom rung of the ladder, but from an eternal point of view, THERE, these people were a chosen people, set apart for a special and holy purpose.

It doesn't matter which side of the tracks you were born on in this world. In Jesus Christ, you are part of a choice and honored group of people. 1 Pt 2:9 says in the NLT, *"You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."* Did you catch our purpose there? Our purpose is to show others the goodness of God. God has set us apart to be emissaries of His goodness. Each one of us is a living, breathing, walking, talking, marketing campaign for the goodness of God.

Body:

God has not set you apart to remove you from the world, but to reach the world through you. And one of the main ways we can do that is through the quality and character of our work. So, let's read our passage of Scripture, then we'll address this issue of slavery, and then deal with how this applies to our lives.

18 Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

Let's deal first with the question of slavery. It's become very popular today for the new atheists to attack the Bible or Christianity because of their apparent acceptance of slavery.

1 " Century Slavery

The slavery that existed in the Roman Empire was vastly different from the race based slavery that stains our own American history. Slavery was a common practice in the ancient world. This isn't to justify it in any way, but simply to explain that it was the common and accepted practice. The entire Roman economic system was deeply rooted in slavery. As much as 1/3 of the population in some provinces were slaves. Some 60,000,000 slaves were active in the Roman economy in the 1st Century.

However, for most people, slavery was not a permanent condition. It was a temporary station on the path toward freedom. Many people voluntarily enslaved themselves to Roman citizens so with good behavior and adequate savings, they too could become full Roman citizens.

Other slaves were prisoners serving sentences for crimes, or prisoners of war who'd been defeated in battle by the Romans.

1st Century slavery was not based on race, or any other incidental factor. To be a slave was not to be assigned a specific, permanent, low-class station in life. Slaves often had the status and power connected with their masters, if their master was powerful; their slaves shared in that power. Thus, it was desirable, at times, to be a slave. Many chose slavery over the vagabond existence of finding odd jobs, and dealing with the stresses of unemployment, drought, and downturns in the economy. It was far more easy and convenient for many to leave those worries to someone else and be their servant.

Neither was slavery a refuge only for low-skill menial labor. Doctors, teachers writers, accountants, agents, bailiffs, overseers, secretaries, and ship captains all filled the slave population. In essence, slavery was simply the way many made a living and put food on the table, just as our employment in our jobs is a way for us to make a living, pay the bills and put food on the table

The quality of a slave's existence depended in large part on the character of one's master. Many were kind and reasonable, however, some were harsh and despotic.

As Christianity spread in the ancient world it found a receptive audience in the slave class. The message of "freedom in Christ" stirred their hearts. But this same message combined with the new found faith of their slaves, stirred fear in the hearts of many masters. They feared a breakdown in morale, a reduction in productivity, and, even worse, a revolt.

But Peter knew this wouldn't help the cause of Christ. It would only hinder the gospel advance. Christians needed to be faithful, dedicated workers who let their lights shine. A lazy, distracted, and rebellious worker wouldn't draw anyone to Christ. This is what motivated Peter to write what wrote here in 1 Peter.

Peter and the other inspired writers of the New Testament were writing to churches who had to live in the economic reality of their day. They were not writing a treatise on slavery. Instead, they were writing to Christians on how to live Christ-like lives within their culture. This is why Peter and Paul both address the hearts and minds of masters and slaves without calling for revolution (Eph. 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1). Heart change must precede societal change.

In Revelation 18, the wicked worldly system is portrayed as Babylon the Great. Babylon was an ancient empire that was well known for its wickedness and greed. And so Babylon became a symbol for all such worldly systems. Revelation 18 is a pronouncement of God's judgment against Babylon and a prophecy of its demise.

After Babylon's fall, the merchants and traders and ship captains who'd all prostituted themselves to Babylon in the name of corporate greed, weep and mourn their losses. Verses 11 and 13 read like an ancient ship's cargo manifest, listing all the luxury goods that were brought from afar to satisfy the greedy desires of the great Babylon of John's day— Rome.

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots and slaves, that is human souls.

And the text literally translated from the Greek reads, "bodies." That's how it would read on a cargo manifest; not people, or humans, or even slaves, but simply "bodies." They are nothing more than livestock listed after the cattle, sheep, and horses. They also come at the end of the

manifest as though the fine jewels, precious metals, and rare cargo are more valuable than these people.

In the eyes of wicked, greedy people, they are just bodies to be used, but John is sure to identify them as “HUMAN SOULS.” God sees these slaves as souls that he created, souls that he loves, and souls that he sent his son to save. Anything that views people simply as something to be used, as something disposable, or marketable, is an abomination in God’s eyes, whether its slavery, or sex trafficking, pornography, abortion, or as in the eyes of modern merchants—sources of data to be captured, stored, analyzed through algorithms, and then sold to the highest bidder. This verse makes clear how God views such things, and it is in part why God’s judgment falls on wicked Babylon.

The 21st Century Rat Race

Though the structure of the economy and the design of the workforce have changed in 2,000 years, many of the same issues remain for us today. Peter's advice to the slaves two millennia ago addresses these problems in extraordinary fashion, and still speaks to those problems today. Whether it's 1st Century slavery or the 21st Century rat race, God's Word still applies

According to a Gallup Poll, 85% of us hate our jobs.ⁱ There are millions of people who are unhappy with their place in life. But consider the plight of a slave. Today, we have so many more choices. We can choose what kind of work we do, whom we work for, and many other things. We can bargain for better pay and conditions. Employees receive certain protections and have certain rights recognized by the law. If we find a particular job unjust, we can always quit or seek to change positions. These options were often simply not available to the 1st Century slave. Now, if the things that Peter says are true for them in their situation, how much more so are the true for us in our work?

Our Work as a Witness

The first thing he tells them is this, *“Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.”* Basically, he's saying, “Do a good job, even if your boss doesn’t deserve it. “ Do what you're told, do your best work, for good bosses and bad bosses alike. We don't want to give the non-Christians we work with any justifiable reason to reject Jesus or look down on the faith. We don't want anything to hinder our Christian witness.

It comes down to this, if we don't do a good job in our work, it doesn't matter how much we profess our faith, because our action, or inaction at work speak louder than our words. Our work must back up our witness. In fact, if you do shoddy work, it would be better to keep your faith a secret, because your shoddy work will drag the name of Christ through the mud, and you will be giving people a reason not to believe. Paul wrote to the young minister, Timothy, to give the slaves in his congregation this instruction, *“All who are under the yoke of slavery should*

consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered."

How is it possible to have such an attitude in our work? It seems very difficult in our free enterprise system, how could Peter expect this of us, let alone a slave? We can find the answer in one of Paul's letters. Having the right attitude in our work comes in knowing whom you're working for. Ultimately, it's not your boss that you work for. It's not the company that pays your wages or salary. Entrepreneurs will tell you the secret of happiness in your work is working for yourself. But that's not it either. It's not working for yourself or your family. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 6:5-8

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. 6 Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. 7 Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 8 Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free

Ultimately, all of our work, no matter how menial or meaningless we think it is, is done for Jesus Christ. We are to do all that we do to the glory of God, and that includes our employment. You don't have to be a preacher or missionary to do kingdom work. Every Christian who works for a living is doing kingdom work, and we should do our work like its kingdom work. Our motivation should be as it would as if it was Jesus Himself who signed our paychecks and inspected our work. Each thing you do in your work is an act of worship given to God and a testimony of Christ given to the world.

My best friend Jamie worked a series of menial odd jobs while trying to help his wife get through school, after she had worked to get him through school. One of his jobs was as a janitor where cleaned floors and scrubbed toilets. This was not the grand and glorious labor he had in mind years before when he started college He was feeling very low and worthless, until he realized that even that work was ministry. Here's how he explained his grand revelation to me, "Those are Jesus' toilets I'm cleaning, and I'm going to clean them to the glory of God

So with this attitude in mind, it is possible, even in the workplace, for us to do as

Peter says in vs. 12, "Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes to judge the world."

Let me give you three practical areas that will help you be a witness in your work.

Honesty

The first area is honesty. Christians must be honest, dependable, trustworthy workers. This one thing alone will make a huge difference, and cause the light of Christ to shine. One of the

biggest problems that employers face is inventory shrinkage, which for the most part, is a nice way of saying stealing. According to an article on CNBC employee theft costs employers \$50 billion a year.ⁱⁱ

When you add to that the additional billions that companies spend in loss prevention, you have a huge economic problem in this country. However, at its root, it is not an economic problem. It is a moral problem

It's a problem I've seen in every secular job I've worked in. I spent several years in high school and college working in a grocery store. We had a shelf in the back for storing damaged items. These were things that fell off the shelf or got damaged with a box cutter. It was funny how 90% of the items on the damaged rack were always cookies and potato chips. Workers were purposely damaging items so they could eat them.

Employee theft comes in all shapes and sizes— personal time on the company clock, office supplies taken home for personal use, personal expenses charged to the company card, hanging out on Pinterest when you're supposed to be running reports. In many instances, it is an accepted practice, and Christians will justify it saying, "Well, everybody does it." Friends, this is where we need to let our lights shine

The first part of Ephesians 4:28 says, *"If you are a thief, stop stealing."* It can't be put any plainer than that. When you steal from your work, you are stealing from the glory of God, and you are stealing your Christian witness and lining the pockets of Satan. God is a God of truth. Jesus said He is the truth. We are to represent Him.

Hard Work

A second opportunity for witness in our workplace comes from our work ethic. In fact, the verse we just read in Ephesians goes on to say, *"Begin using your hands for honest work."* 1 Thes. 4:11 says, *"This should be your ambition: to live a quiet life minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we commanded you before."*

In many ways this country was built up on a hard work ethic. This hard work ethic was once known as the "protestant work ethic." This arose from Christians seeing all their work being done for God, so they did their best. This hard work ethic has been lost in many ways. We live in the day of the lazy, spoiled worker who thinks nothing of arriving late and leaving early, who does the least amount of work possible, but demands higher pay possible. And to be fair, those in management are usually just as greedy and self-serving.

The work of a Christian, however, should reflect the fact that we work for a higher purpose and a greater reward. The Christian should work better and harder because he has the highest motivation Remember, those are Jesus' toilets you're cleaning

Speech

A third area where we as Christians can impact your workplace is with our speech. Workplaces are often cesspools of slander, gossip and obscenity. I know for many of you foul language, obscene jokes, and back stabbing insults are a daily matter of course at work. It can be very easy for our own speech to get pulled down to that level. But the manner of our speech must always be on a higher level

Paul continues in Eph 4 with these words, *“Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. (Eph 4:29).”* To the Colossians he writes, *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity, Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone Always let the flavor of your speech be wholesome and uplifting (Col 4:5-6).”*

This doesn't mean that you go around your workplace lecturing others about how they talk; just let your own speech stand in stunning contrast to that of others.

Conclusion:

If you do these things consistently, you will earn the respect and trust of most of the people you work for and work with. When your boss needs someone they can rely on, someone they know won't let them down; they will know they can come to you. When a coworker has a problem and they need someone to talk to; they will come to you, because they know you won't violate their confidence, and that you will respond in love. And most importantly, by letting your light shine in your honesty, hard work and uplifting speech you will be given opportunities to draw your coworkers to Christ

I realize there are some impossible nuts to crack, but we do have the freedom of changing jobs. But be warned, if you think finding the right job is the key to happiness in life, you will never find it. Having the right attitude toward your work is the key to finding fulfillment in your labor.

ⁱ https://news.gallup.com/opinion/chairman/212045/world-broken-workplace.aspx?g_source=position1&g_medium=related&g_campaign=tiles

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/12/workplace-crime-costs-us-businesses-50-billion-a-year.html>