

"As to the Lord" (Eph. 6:7)

Employment: its demands and dangers

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This article considers the simple and direct teaching in the Epistle to the Ephesians about the believers' attitude and approach to work, which sets standards that contrast with those in today's society. Believers' work is to be consecrated to the Lord, requiring them to make thoughtful and prayerful decisions about their type of work and to be aware of the pitfalls that confront the disciple of Christ in a corrupt world.

MAN WAS MADE for work. Being fashioned in the image of his Creator, the God Whose work is everywhere evident around us, he too was required to be active. Psalm 104, the great psalm of praise for the Almighty's wisdom in creation, includes reference to man's daily toil: "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening" (v. 23). Even before the Fall, Adam was put into the Garden of Eden "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). And, following his rebellion against God, it was ordained that he should eat bread "in the sweat of [his] face" until he returned to the ground (3:19).

In spite of the vastly different social conditions in the Western world today, the edict still applies, and brethren and sisters are not exempt, even if for most the daily toil is now mental rather than physical. For many disciples in the developing countries the old principle is still a literal reality too.

As the Apostle Paul reminded the Thessalonians: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:10-12).

It is also necessary to recognise that in the modern industrialised world unemployment is an unpleasant reality from which believers are not always exempt. Those who find themselves in this position, whilst having a responsibility to continue to seek work, have the opportunity to devote more time to the work of the Truth. At the same time they should be given every sup-

port from the ecclesias and the Brotherhood as a whole.

Submitting yourselves

This principle of the need to work is therefore taken as read by the apostle when writing to the Ephesians. What he is rather concerned to elaborate is the *attitude* to work that is right for disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, based upon the principle of *submission*. Examination of the text of Ephesians 5 and 6 will reveal that the passage about the duty of "servants" (6:5-8), which forms the basis of our title, is part of the section of spiritual advice to all classes of disciples that begins in 5:17: "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is . . . *submitting* yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (5:17,21). The apostle's injunction continues: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness [NKJV, sincerity] of your heart, as unto Christ . . . with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (6:5,7).

So those who are classed as servants, which would be equivalent today to employees, are exhorted to be obedient to their masters or 'managers' (Gk. *kurioi*, lords), with fear and trembling. The Apostle Peter has the same message in his first letter: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (1 Pet. 2:18). This idea of submission as an approach for people at work hardly matches with the accepted view of employment today, where self-assertiveness and even aggression are considered essential for personal success. It is, however, displayed in the example of the Lord Jesus himself, who was "*subject* unto" his parents (Lk. 2:51), and presumably

worked for his living as a carpenter before entering upon his ministry.

There is a further difficulty in relating Paul's instructions to the modern workplace. The concept of being obedient to "masters" in Ephesians 6 may seem somewhat irrelevant when perhaps the majority of working Christadelphians will find themselves employed by large, faceless organisations, such as local authorities, government departments or multinational corporations. In these circumstances, loyal and faithful service to some middle manager, possibly concerned only with his own self-advancement, may be difficult to sustain, and yet, in the spirit of the apostle's injunction, is just as necessary to strive for as in the situation of, say, a small business where the manager is another brother or sister.

Paul highlights another potential pitfall for the disciple in employment, which is common in the world: the practice of working *to be seen* by those in positions of authority. Rather is the disciple of Christ to work, in the memorable phrase of the AV, "not with eyeservice [Gk. *ophthalmouleia*], as menpleasers" (6:6).

In the writer's experience this can be a constant temptation, when both financial reward and promotion within a company are in no small measure dependent upon the impression given to one's superiors. It frequently encourages employees to work long beyond their contracted hours (often having squandered time earlier in the day chatting and drinking coffee) in order to impress the boss with their commitment. Such behaviour can actually be damaging to health and impose a strain upon marriage and the responsibilities in bringing up children, quite apart from being unworthy of disciples. Christadelphian workers should certainly make every effort to avoid being caught up into this worldly rat race.

On the other hand, it is frequently their conscientious application to work, "as unto the Lord", that results in brethren and sisters finding themselves singled out for promotion to managerial positions. It must be recognised that there are potential dangers in such advancement, in terms of the demands that can be placed upon them. Nevertheless, some members of our community have found themselves in very senior positions indeed. In all such situations the second part of the apostle's admonitions concerning work becomes applicable: "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" (v. 9). In other words, they are to treat those subordinate to them as they would wish to be treated by Christ at his coming. Again, this may conflict with current views in the business world on management 'style' and performance assessment methods, but firmly sets the standard for the believer in a managerial position.

As unto Christ

The key principle of work for followers of Jesus is that all of their labours should be consecrated to him. They are to think of him as their true 'manager', and prayerfully offer their daily service to him just as much as their spiritual devotions of worship and service in the ecclesia: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh . . . as unto Christ . . . with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (vv. 5,7).

It has to be confessed that this is easier with some types of work than with others. The craftsman who uses God-given skills to create useful or beautiful goods, as for instance making a piece of furniture or helping to construct a house, has a tangible product at the end of his labours to offer to his Lord. It is likely that this was the experience of the carpenter from Nazareth. For many today, on the other hand, the product of their work may apparently consist of no more than having moved some pieces of paper from one office tray to another, or created some files in a computer's memory. Yet whatever the field of work, it behoves the employee of Christ to perform every task to the best of his or her ability, with the prime objective of dedicating it to him. This in turn creates a powerful criterion for judging whether our field of work is suitable for a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Can it in all conscience be offered unto him? Just as in any of our daily activities we do well to ask ourselves if we would be happy to share them with our Lord, so with our work it is essential that we can be sure he would not disapprove of our chosen vocation.

For instance, our stand against any involvement in the armed forces of the world's governments must logically mean that we should not be associated with the design or production of armaments in our jobs. Yet this has not always been obvious to Christadelphians; during the First World War several brethren seeking exemption from conscription were refused on the grounds that they were currently working in

armaments factories.¹ Equally, there are other types of employment in this corrupt world that believers would do well to avoid in order to have a clear conscience before their Lord. The securing of sales or contracts in many countries can require the offering of bribes and other more subtle inducements, practices which are utterly denounced in the Word of God (Deut. 16:19; Ps. 26:9-11).

No doubt these factors and many others can create additional problems for the already fraught task of finding suitable employment in societies where jobs are often difficult to come by. However, pleasing the Master we have promised to serve for life must be a priority in selecting our type of daily toil in the world. Also, whatever job we enter it is essential that we make clear, in a quiet and Christlike manner, the standards of honesty and integrity that we are bound to adhere to, and the dishonest practices that we will have nothing to do with. Usually we will earn respect from our colleagues for such a stand, but if not, then we should be prepared to endure ridicule or abuse for the sake of our Lord: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" (1 Pet. 4:14).

Balancing our time

Every brother or sister in work has to balance the time spent in meeting the demands of their job with the daily routines of the home and then the time devoted to the ecclesia and the service of God. It is widely recognised that for many today the demands of employers on their employees' time seem to be constantly increasing, meaning that less time is available for spiritual matters. It is noticeable that attendance at mid-week Bible Classes, particularly by young brethren and sisters in work, has suffered in recent times because of this trend.

As mentioned above, excessive time spent at the workplace can be deleterious to both physical and spiritual health, and the Christadelphian anxious to give his best to the Lord's service will make every effort to ensure a wise division of his time. However, it is worth noting that this is not a new situation. Even the Apostle Paul, in order not to make himself indebted to any of the ecclesias, insisted on carrying on with his manual work of tentmaking during his ministry: "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail *night and day*, that we might not be chargeable to any of you" (2 Thess. 3:7,8). The picture of the apostle implied here, labouring into the night by the light of an oil lamp to complete an order for a tent, while mentally preparing his next address for preaching the gospel, must fill us with admiration for both his commitment and his stamina.

Perhaps the motivation for working long hours needs to be examined. Is it an inevitable consequence of the demands of the job and necessary for the disciple in order to do his or her work thoroughly, "as unto the Lord"? Or is it, as with so many in the world, in order to impress the management, and thus secure promotion, increased reward and higher status? The latter is surely unworthy of followers of the man from Nazareth, who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). The warning words of the apostle concerning the love of wealth could well be written on the office walls of twenty-first-century saints: "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted [RV, reaching] after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

It is well known in the world that there are ambitious employees whose whole lives seem to be devoted to their work, and who have little time for their families. For us, however, the crucial work is to serve and honour the Lord who died to save us, and our daily toil is a means to that end. For a servant of Christ the maxim should be, "I work to live, not live to work", remembering that the *true* life we are seeking is that which is to come in the Kingdom of God.

Social involvement

The demands of the modern market economy mean that companies and organisations are constantly driven to seek ever greater efficiency in order to face their competitors. This in turn leads to their placing greater demands upon employees. They are expected to be 'team players', and to fit in with the activities and social interests

1. See *Without the Camp*, F. G. Jannaway, 1917, ch. 53, "Munition Making".

of their colleagues outside of working hours. These may extend to outings, charity fund-raising events, parties, dinners and weekends away. None of these can be seen as evil in itself (1 Cor. 10:27), and our behaviour in the company of workmates from the world can provide an opportunity for witness to our faith and way of life.

However, it has to be said that very often the general conduct at such events can leave much to be desired, with excessive drinking a common feature. From personal experience the subjects of conversation at such events rarely relate to serious subjects and often deteriorate into obscene humour as the alcohol flows. The sincere disciple can very soon feel extremely uncomfortable in such circumstances, and it is much better to make the stand against participation in such events *beforehand*, if it is suspected that this will be the outcome, rather than afterwards, even if it earns the scorn of colleagues:

“For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead” (1 Pet. 4:3-5).

Another common practice in the workplace is the holding of raffles and sweepstakes. The latter, which are usually a form of betting on the outcome of horse races or other sporting events, with a financial gain in view, are surely not a worthy occupation for followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, raffles may seem to be more justified, since they are normally intended to raise money for charity, even though again there is the prospect of financial gain for the winner. In this case a useful stratagem is to offer to make a donation for the charity in question, providing the cause is suitable, without entering the draw.

Exercising the conscience

Decisions about the type of work and company one should engage in, the degree of closeness to fellow employees and the types of social activity engaged in are all, of course, matters of conscience for individual believers. Those consciences, however, should be educated in the ways of the Lord Jesus, from the Word of God, always remembering that believers are on dis-

play in this world as the representatives of Christ himself. It is all too easy to be swayed by friendly colleagues into taking part in worldly pursuits that are not appropriate for brethren and sisters, who are called upon to be separated from the world and its ways unto Christ Jesus.

Another feature of the workplace today is that many people think nothing of using their employers' materials and equipment for their own use. The costs to industry and other organisations of employees using their telephones to do their shopping, pay bills and arrange holidays is reported to run into billions of pounds a year. It is also commonplace for employees to take time off work for spurious sickness. Clearly these practices are tantamount to theft, and should not be countenanced by true Christians seeking to live in accordance with the commandments of their Lord. Yet the temptations may be strong when they find themselves in a culture where 'everyone does it'.

Our daily work is to be done to the best of our ability, as though for the Lord himself. We are to try to make our performance of that work a witness for the beliefs that we hold, and of the glorious hope for the future, which is our true motivation. In the words of the Apostle Peter: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation [NKJV, conduct] honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:11,12).

Points for thought and discussion

- What constitutes 'job satisfaction' for a believer in Christ?
- Is the financial reward of a disciple's job more important in a Western country than in the Third World?
- Is it justified to work more hours with less free time in order to be able to afford to live in a 'better' neighbourhood, where, for instance, the children have a safer environment?
- Is it acceptable to speak to a colleague about the Truth during working hours?
- Does work in the medical profession have more value than other types of work?