

Spirit-Filled Servants

Ephesians 6:5-8

Halifax: 5 October 2008

Introduction

Today, as we continue our sermon series in Ephesians,

- We come to the third submission relationship that Paul describes...
- So far, he has described the relationship of marriage and the relationship of children with their parents...
 - but now He moves on to the relationship of the servant with his master.

You will recall that Paul has been showing us how we will live in these submission relationships when we are filled with the Spirit...

- He called us to be filled with the Spirit back in Ephesian 5:18...
 - And he told us briefly how the filling of the Spirit would affect our worship (v. 19), our attitude (v. 20), and our submission relationships (v. 21)...
- Concerning our submission relationships, he says that when we are filled with the Spirit, we will submit to one another in the fear of Christ.
 - The word submit means “to line up under.”
 - He is saying that each of us, when filled with the Spirit, will take the place that Christ has appointed for us in relation to each other—
 - We will line up under each other and, on our part at least, will live according to His calling for us in each relationship.
 - A Spirit-filled wife will submit to her husband,
 - A Spirit-filled husband will take his God-appointed responsibility and love his wife as Christ loved the church...
 - A Spirit-filled child will honour his father and mother...
 - And a Spirit-filled father will not provoke his sons and daughters to wrath but will bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.
- In each of these relationships, Paul is showing us how our relationship with Christ ought to make a difference.
 - As those who delight in submitting to the authority of Christ,
 - we will know how we ought to conduct ourselves under the authority of others...of those He has placed over us...
 - And as those who understand the way Christ exercises His authority over us,

- we will know how we ought to exercise authority over those He has placed under our authority...
- The Spirit works in us, not in a mechanical way, but in a personal way...
 - Leading to Christ, and showing us Christ and restoring us to truth and uprightness so that we delight in Christ.
 - And it is this relationship with Him that changes the way we live with others...
 - If our leading and our following are not being transformed,
 - it indicates that there is a problem in our relationship with Christ—
 - that we are not abiding in Him—
 - that we need to cry out for God’s Spirit to work in us.

And you glance over Paul’s treatment of the third submission relationship that he describes in Ephesians—

- the relationship of servant to master—
 - you can see what his main emphasis is...
 - He emphasises the need of the servant to render his service to his master to Christ... to do his serve for Christ...
 - Just look at the passage and you can see this emphasis...
 - Every verse mentions it...
 - vs 5 says, “as unto Christ...”
 - vs 6 says, “as bondservants of Christ...”
 - vs 7 says, “as to the Lord and not unto men...”
 - and vs 8 promises a reward from the Lord...
 - Everything is focused on doing this service for the Lord...
- And there is good reason for this...
 - In the matrimonial and the filial relationship,
 - natural affection is often present.
 - There is a fondness for the other person...
 - And that makes it easier for us to be faithful in fulfilling our duties toward them.
 - But in the relationship of a servant to his master,

- natural affection is often not present...
 - It can be—but often it is not...
- Therefore, it is all the more necessary in *this* relationship that the servant look beyond his earthly master and keep his eye on Christ.
 - That way, even when his master is oppressive or unjust or unreasonable,
 - or when his labour is tedious or toilsome,
 - the Christian servant can still find reason to do his service with faithfulness and sincerity.
 - He realises that he is not serving man, but the Lord Jesus Himself!

In preparing this sermon, I had originally thought of making it one of my main points that the servant is to do his service to Christ,

- but when I realised that this was emphasised in every verse,
 - I realised that to be true to the text,
 - I would have to build the entire sermon around this concept.

And so for my outline today,

- I wish to present to you three implications of what it means to do your work for Christ...
 - First, that doing your work for Christ means that you will obey those He has placed over you on earth...
 - Secondly, that doing your work for Christ means that you will do it with a cheerful attitude...
 - Thirdly, that doing your work for Christ means that you will do it with an eye to receiving a reward from Him.

But before I move on with these three implications, I want you to understand something...

- I want you to understand that the persons who are addressed here are in fact full-fledged slaves...
 - There are quite a few Greek words that Paul might have used to refer to different kinds of servants,
 - but the word he selected is the word δούλος (doulos).
 - δούλος refers to the strongest kind of servitude...
 - to a slave in the fullest sense—

- one who was bound to his master for life and was considered the property of his master...
- About 1/3 of the Greco-Roman population was under this kind of slavery at the time Paul wrote this,
 - so we are not talking quite a few persons...
 - especially when we remember that many in the church were from this lowly class.
- Now of course we do not have this type of slavery today...
 - but we certainly do have less binding relationships of servitude as when we agree to work for someone for wages.
 - And I say,
 - if the principles here involving cheerful service apply to a slave who has no choice and no way to change masters,
 - how much more do they apply to us in our more voluntary relationships of servitude!
 - If the Lord expected the slaves of the first century to follow the principles found in these verses...
 - how much more does He expect you to follow them in your far less oppressive forms of service?

Okay, with that in mind, let me now move along to the first implication of doing your work of Christ...

I. When you do your work for Christ, you will obey those He has placed over you on earth.

- You see that this is stated quite clearly in verse 5:
 - Eph 6:5: Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, with sincerity of heart...
- A. There is to be none of that super-spiritual detachment here!
 1. There are those who, when told that they are to do their work for Christ and not for man,
 - twist this around to mean that they are not at work to serve a boss at all!
 - You know what I am talking about...
 - Instead of putting in a full days work for the one who hired them,
 - these persons spend their time evangelising their co-workers or their boss's clients...

- or they use their time at work to do Bible study...
 - or give do not give full attention to the work they have been given to do...
- Even worse, they do not work at all...
 - claiming that they are doing ministry while refusing to provide for themselves or their family—
2. You see that the servant is clearly called to obey His master according to the flesh...
- That means that when he tells you to make bricks all day,
 - you are not called to spend half your day telling your fellow-servants about Christ...
 - Of when he tells you to get a report ready,
 - you are not to spend part of your time surfing the internet to see what it says about justification.
 - I tell you bluntly that that is not God's will for you!
 - God's will is to do what your earthly master told you to do!
 - You can study about justification or do your evangelism after you have put in an honest days work!
3. Paul says that you are to do your work for your earthly master with "fear and trembling" and with "sincerity of heart."
- a. *Fear and trembling* means that you are to be careful to do what your boss has asked you to do—
- To put it in the vernacular, you are to take earnest care that you do not mess up!
 - You are to have a concern to carry out fully what you have been asked to do in the way you have been asked to do it!
 - You are to aim to please the one who is over you on earth...
 - Fear and trembling does not mean that you are cowering,
 - but it means that you are very much concerned to have things turn out in a way that is pleasing to the one you are working for.

TRANS> Besides fear and trembling, there is to be sincerity of heart.

- b. *Sincerity of heart* is literally singleness of heart...
- That is, you are not to do your work half-heartedly...

- You know, as I was talking about before—
 - with your mind on evangelism when it is supposed to be on making bricks.
- Now of course I don't mean that if you are given a mundane job you may not occupy your mind with higher things...
 - But what I mean is,
 - you must not allow yourself to be diverted from the task you have been given to do...
 - so that you are slower than you need to be or so that you make a lot of mistakes...
 - You are to give your whole heart to it—
 - It is what the Lord Jesus has called you to do.

TRANS> I suppose there are some who are just too spiritual for this kind of thing—for such an earthly commandment...

- but this is clearly what the Lord calls you to do in your service to others...

B. You need to understand that work is honourable!

1. God Himself is our example

- a. We are told that God worked for six days in order to create this world that we live in...
 - He worked for six days and He rested on the seventh...
 - And He made us in His image and commanded us to follow His example in a weekly cycle of six day of work and a seventh day of rest.
- b. Those six days of work were for us...
 - God made this world and filled it with beautiful things for us...
 - He gave us food, he gave us gold, he gave us trees and oceans and stars...
 - He gave us the Sun and the Moon...
 - He gave us each other.
 - He is the greatest servant because He did more for us than we will ever do for anyone else.
 - He laboured in order to bless us.
- c. But I say, now He has gone even beyond this...
 - He has done the work of redemption!

- Seeing that we are fallen, the Lord broke His Sabbath rest...
 - He broke it in order that He might do a work of necessity and mercy for us—
 - that is, a work that had to be done if we were to be redeemed and restored...
- He sent His Son to come to this sinful world and bear our sins on the cross...
 - He broke His rest of completed creation to make a new creation for us in Christ Jesus...
 - He laboured intensely for us and He has completed this work...
 - It was a very toilsome and distasteful work...
 - It was a work of service for those who were unworthy and ungrateful...
 - It was a work that was far beneath the dignity of the Son of God.

TRANS> Christian, you of all people should understand how the Lord has laboured for us.

- As you are more and more filled with the Spirit,
 - you more and more grasp the full extent of what Christ has done for you in His service for you!

2. And now He calls you to serve—

- You see what a difference it ought to make when you know Christ and understand what He has done for you!
 - a. As He has done good for you, so you are to do good for others...
 - You are to labour in the calling that He has given you for the blessing of others!
 - God has no use for the lazy man who does not provide for himself and for his household when he is able...
 - We were created to work—to serve each other and to do good for each other!
 - b. Some seem to carry the notion that labour itself is a curse, but it is not...
 - God called us to labour and serve before the fall...
 - Labour is not the curse, but labour has been cursed...
 - Since the fall, we have many hardships in our labour...
 - we have things that destroy our work and hinder our work...
 - we make mistakes...

- we have computer crashes and we have storms that tear down what we have built and we have rot and we have mould and we have conflicts with each other in our work...
 - But work itself is good—
 - It is the way that God has appointed for us to do good to each other and to show our love to each other.
 - We can actually do things that are a blessing to our neighbour even as God has done.
- c. So Christian, how is your work?
- Are you imitating your master in heaven?
 - Do obey your earthly masters, recognising that in obeying them, you are obeying the Lord and honouring Him?

TRANS> So you see that there is no place for this super-spiritual attitude that looks at plain old every day work as necessary evil...

- It is not that at all—it is a way to bless your neighbour for the glory of God...
- You cannot skip over your masters on earth to obey the Lord directly, but you obey Him by obeying your masters on earth.
 - That's the first implication of doing your work for Christ.
 - Now let's look at the second...

II. When you do your work for Christ, you will do it with a cheerful attitude.

A. At the end of verse 5, it says it all in three little words... “as to Christ.”

1. That explains how you are to do it...
 - As if you are doing it for Him...
 - a. You see, you are—He makes Himself the recipient of our daily work.
 - He receives whatever you do each day in your vocation...
 - whatever you do to bless others—whether it be heart surgery or putting a bandaid on a child's knee—as done for Him.
 - When a Christian waitress fills a water glass, she is to see it as though she were filling Christ's water glass...
 - She is to do it for him...
 - b. This is the true biblical understanding of work that was recovered in the Protestant Reformation...
 - It is the priesthood of the believer!

- The priesthood of the believer was not the notion that everyone is called to preach or to lead in worship...
 - But that your daily service to your neighbour—what you do from 9 to 5—is to be presented to Christ as a sacrifice for service.
 - You are to do it as to Christ!
 - You are to do it, as verse 7 says, not at last to men but to the Lord!
 - c. This is not a contraction to what we just saw...about serving your masters on earth.
 - The point is that your ordinary work—
 - your daily vocation that involves doing whatever you do for your neighbour—
 - is to be done for Jesus Christ.
 - Yes, it is to be a blessing to your neighbour and in that way it is done for him,
 - but you are to present it as your daily offering to Jesus Christ.
2. Now if you are filled with the Spirit...
- then you will be of such a mind that you can never do enough for Christ!
 - You will see the height and breadth and length and width of His love for you...
 - You will see the glory of his calling...and of the eternal life He is bringing you into...
 - You will see all this when you are filled with the Spirit because the Spirit shows us Christ when we are filled with Him...
 - and you will feel that you can never do enough for Him!
 - You will feel that there is nothing better than to please Him whom your soul loves...
 - And so it will be that when you learn that He is pleased with your everyday labour...
 - When you learn that He makes Himself the recipient of your daily labour...
 - that whenever you serve your neighbour, He counts it as done for Him...
 - And that this is not just in those special works,
 - but in your everyday work—

- whether that involves turning a wrench or changing dirty diapers...
- it will transform your whole attitude about it!
 - You will do it as to Christ!

B. You see how this changes your whole attitude...

1. No longer are you only serving the eyes of man as men pleasers...
 - You are now doing your work before the eyes of the Lord who sees the heart and the attitude...
 - You are now doing your work as a bondservant to Christ...
 - Christ who never oppresses you or treats you with injustice.
 - Christ who sees your heart and your attitude.
 - Christ whom you love.

2. You are doing your work, as it says in verse 7, “with good will”...
 - The word translated “good will” is the word *eunoia* (*yoo'-noy-ah*) which carries the idea of zeal and enthusiasm that come from the heart.
 - This means that you work as one who is glad to be working...
 - even if the work is very tedious or very laborious...
 - you count it a very high privilege because of the one you are doing it for!
 - Remember that because of our sin, Christ had to perform the most difficult labour that can be imagined...
 - If He had to labour with tremendous affliction through no fault of His own,
 - How much more ought you to be willing to labour under affliction.

3. My brothers and sisters, what a spring this will put in your step!
 - What a change it will bring to your attitude about your work when you are filled with the Spirit...
 - When you are filled with love and admiration and delight in your Saviour and with the realisation that you can serve Him in your everyday calling!
 - There is no place for dragging along!
 - There is no place for drowsiness!
 - There is no place for complaining and reluctance!
 - It is for Christ!

TRANS> And because Christ is pleased to receive your work,

- He will reward you for it...
- And that brings us to the third implication of doing your work for Him...

III. When you do your work for Christ, you will do it with an eye to receiving a reward from Him.

A. Now I know that this will rub some of you the wrong way...

1. You will say,

- “Humph! That’s not a very good motivation!
- Imagine doing your work for a reward!”

2. But I tell you that your gracious Lord is pleased to motivate us with this...

- this “base motivation!”
- a. He does it right here in our text—right here in verse 8...
 - It means just what it says:
 - Eph 6:8: “knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free.
 - You see the context here...
 - We are supposed to do our work with a good attitude because we know that we will receive a reward for it!

b. And I say that this is no isolated passage!

1) Jesus Himself frequently mentions rewards to motive us...

- In the Sermon on the Mount He tells those who are persecuted to rejoice and be exceedingly glad—
 - and why?
 - Is it because they are masochistic and enjoy suffering?
- No, He says:
 - Matthew 5:12: “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven.”
- And then later on in the Sermon on the Mount He is telling His disciples not to give alms to be seen by men...
 - and what is the reason He gives to motivate them to give in secret?
 - because:

- Matthew 6:4: Your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.
- 2) And this same motivation is found in the Epistles and it is found over and over in the book of Revelation—
- in Jesus’ letters to the seven churches...
 - Over and over He promises rewards to them if they are faithful.
3. Now I tell you that if the Lord is pleased to motivate you with rewards,
- you should not consider it to be an unworthy motivation...
 - You should humbly recognise that it is a motivation of which you are in great need!
 - Come on, admit it!
 - You know what it is like at work!
 - You are less than wholehearted in your service!
 - You need this motivation...
 - You need it to keep you focused on the Lord as the One for whom you are labouring when your earthly master’s reward is not enough.

TRANS> But even more than that!

B. What should delight you more than to know that your Lord is pleased with you!

1. He delights in your daily service to Him—no matter how mundane it may be...
 - a. When it is done for His honour with sincerity, He receives it with gladness.
 - It’s hard to believe, isn’t it?
 - But it’s true!
 - He promises to reward us so that we will know that He is pleased with us... pleased with us when we do what He had promised to reward!
 - b. He does not ask you to do some great feat or some great task to attain this reward...
 - He only asked you to put in an honest days work for your neighbour—for the one who is over you in your work.
 - This is what He delights in...
 - This is what He rewards...
 - c. Brothers and sisters, He is pleased with you for simply fulfilling your duty each day!
 - He promises to reward you for it when it is done for Him!

2. Now of course His rewards should not make you proud...
 - a. You need to remember that apart from grace,
 - apart from His forgiveness and apart from his saving work that transforms your heart and attitude,
 - you can't even plough a field in a way that honours Him...
 - in a way that would bring a reward...

TRANS> There is no call for pride—it is by His grace that you are even able to work in way that pleases Him.

- b. And even when you are transformed by His grace to do good works,
 - you need to realise that your works do not actually benefit your Lord—
 - He has no need of your service for His own sake—
 - He is simply showing you His pleasure when He rewards you—
 - He is not paying you the way an earthly master does who needs your service and calculates what it is worth to him...
 - He is simply expressing His pleasure in a way that you can understand.
 - c. And I say,
 - That is what is so marvellous about this!
 - Your Lord is pleased with you when you serve Him by serving others in your everyday calling!
 - He delights in wrench turning, number crunching, diaper changing, and clothes washing...
 - He is saying to you...
 - “That’s it my child—that’s the way to live in my Father’s house—
 - that is His way—
 - that is the way we delight in—
 - that is how you are to live forever in my house—
 - that is how all those I have redeemed will live—
 - “The selfish way of the world is not what pleases me,
 - but love and service that blesses others—
 - that is what I delight in!
 - What a wonderful Lord He is!
 - What a privilege it is to serve Him!