

# Work | More Than A Paycheck

## The Fruit of Our Labor Belongs to God

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4.7

8.11.24

*(1 Tim. 6) All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against. <sup>2</sup> Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.*

*<sup>3</sup> If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, <sup>4</sup> he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, <sup>5</sup> and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. <sup>6</sup> But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. <sup>7</sup> For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. <sup>8</sup> If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

*<sup>11</sup> But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup> that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> which He will bring about at the proper time-- He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*

*<sup>17</sup> Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.*

*<sup>20</sup> O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge " <sup>21</sup> which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.*

*(1 Cor 4.7) For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*

**We're pressing on in our look at WORK**, our jobs, our occupations, our callings, our daily responsibilities. The last five sermons are available online. Last week, we looked at how our work is meant to help people and contribute to the welfare of the secular city where God has situated/exiled us.

Today: how the fruit of our labors/lives rightfully belong to God i.e., how we spend the money we earn, how we spend our time and energies, our attentions, words and actions are all God's. It's a sermon on managing our resources and lives for God's credit or glory.

Some may think, "Ahhhh-HA! I knew they were gonna come after my money sooner or later and here it is!" And I repeat what I've said many times (on this sensitive topic – the church and money) that God wants NOT just your money but your whole life AND that God already owns it all (Ps 24.1), He just wants us to see it that way... AND this is actually very liberating; that's not just a ploy – it's real – this truth can set you free!

When you think of the generosity mandates in the Bible – there are a lot of them and they're heavy! So, think about those each command as a burden loaded into a big wagon (charity, hospitality, kindness, tithing, diligence, good works) – they're all piled high in a cart you have to pull! BUT there's a horse available to pull that wagon AND there's tack, a harness and reins and a bridle) a way to hitch the cart of obligation TO the power of the horse. Those are our three points:

- 1) The Cart**
- 2) The Horse**
- 3) The Hitch**

This is a Pastoral Letter, written to a younger (4.12) pastor to help him do the work to which he was called. The older minister/missionary (St. Paul) is coaching the younger man, Timothy, on how to help the congregation thrive as believers in Jesus Christ. And here at the end of the first letter to Timothy, Paul focusses on honor – that's Timothy's name, "Honored by God" (timay + theos).

Paul coaches the younger pastor to show that congregation how God's grace in Jesus Christ should lead to honorable lives.

And IN that CART – under the heading of honor, Paul says, "Slaves ought to honor their masters..." (Christianity weakens the institution of slavery wherever it goes and slavery eventually ends in a Christianized society. I won't address all the reasons for slavery in the ancient world like debt and prisoners of war etc.) Let's just apply it to the employer-employee relationship in our own day.

Paul says, "Timothy, tell the young believers there in Ephesus to serve their masters/employers with honor. If the employer is a fellow Christian, let the servant serve even more honorably because the servant is helping a brother or sister. Don't let servants be let Christian employees excuse any laziness by saying, "Oh, my employer is a believer; he won't care if I'm late – he believes in grace!"

Do just the opposite – work harder in order to be a joy and a help to a brother. Be honorable!

Then Paul talks about contentment – another aspect of honor. “Godliness should not be used as a get-ahead-in-life-strategy! Godliness is not a means to gain. That’s NOT a right reason to believe in Jesus Christ (“Because if I do believe – the Jesus People will favor me and give me stuff!”) But if you seek God’s Kingdom in your life and in the world, you’ll find that contentment does come along with that seeking: (v. 6 – “godliness IS actually a means of great gain when it leads to contentment” – more on that in a minute!)

Then Paul urges Timothy to warn them not to try to get wealthy but to be content with basic needs. “If we have food and clothing and shelter – we’ll be content.” He says, with Jōb 1.21 (Remember Jōb?) that we brought nothing into the world and will bring nothing with us when we leave.” (7) The rabid pursuit of riches puts one into a situation where he or she will be constantly tempted to justify sin in order to reach the goal. As such, the love of money becomes a “root sin” in that it leads to all kinds of other sins. So, run away from that enticement and run toward all the Christian virtues – righteousness and godliness (nearness to God), faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.”

Run from and run to – it’s a commonly used formula in NT ethics. “Let him who once stole – now work with his hands so he has something to share with those in need” (Eph 4.28). Don’t simply empty your soul of evil but fill it with good.

And skipping down to v. 17, the mentor, tells the protégé to instruct those who ARE wealthy NOT to think that they're “*All That*”. Money is NOT the strong tower of safety it often appears to be. Securities are not always so secure. (Perhaps you know that NASDAQ fell 1,000 points this week – I thank the Lord for that timely sermon illustration even though I’m sorry if you were affected!) We remember the Sub-Prime Loan Crisis in 2008; lots of people lost their retirement money and more... “*the uncertainty of riches*” - not a worthy place to put your confidence.

But picking up on the word “rich,” St. Paul warns that wealth CAN cause people to think that THEY are better than other people, as if THEY were even making their own heart beat. It’s God who makes our hearts beat and He will one day make them stop.

Instead, of being fixated on wealth, “*be rich in good works, be generous and ready to share.*” A tight fist will get you caught in the “monkey trap” – it’s liberating to have an open hand and to be ready to give – (v. 19 “*THIS is life indeed!*”)

Paul ends with a weighty charge to the younger minister – “*O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’ -- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.*” (20-21)

It's a lot. I mean as a pastor... I find the "Pastoral Letters" (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy and Titus) serious, somber, even grave. There's a lot for a minister to do – and I'm not even thinking of PEOPLE'S expectations – but what God calls for ...it's a lot.

And then... what I'm supposed to tell YOU! That's a lot. Are you picturing that CART? It's piled high with obligations! Don't complain about your boss and share your HOME and STUFF and MONEY – like it's all an active pursuit in the Christian life. Like radical generosity is central to the normal Christian life. AND I have to remind you and YOU HAVE TO DO IT... WE have to do it. And your car is in the shop. AND YOUR SON is making some really bad decisions. And I WISH I could get more involved at church but right now... and I'm concerned about this election. And frankly, my boss is killin' me. And my husband and I are having some real problems.

*All the pain inside amplified by the  
Fact that I can't get by with my nine-to-  
Five and I can't provide the right type of life for my family*  
(Marshall Mathers)

I get it. Here we are in the most prosperous nation and in this affluent part of the nation... And it just seems like you can't squeeze blood from a turnip and ... "Well, T.J., your right! My cart is piled high and this doesn't seem liberating AT ALL!"

Well, as they say, "Don't put the cart before the horse. The bottom line to this charge to the young pastor is... did you see it? "Grace be with you."

There is a horse to pull the cart. The middle paragraph (vv. 11-16) like a nuclear reactor of pulsating energy at the center of these demands. This is the regular NT pattern – that where there are commands there is also the dynamic, the energy GIFTED to us to keep those commands in a new and living way (Heb 10.20). There IS a Source of motivation and energy. The central teaching, (v. 4) the "*doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ conforms us to godliness*". Paul wants us to see that Jesus Christ made the good confession before Pilate for all His people.

He stood condemned in our place and Pilate had Him nailed to a cross IN MY PLACE. Infinite generosity. In another place, God, through His Apostle, told the Corinthians, "*What do you have that you did not receive? And if you DID receive it, why do you boast as if you had NOT received it?*"

Don't you see, Christian, that (v. 17) "God richly supplies all things for us to enjoy"? Don't you see that "*HE who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" (Rom. 8.32)

Don't you see HIS generosity... WHOSE generosity? V. 13, "(the) God who gives life to all things", who gave Jesus Christ to be condemned before Pilate that WE might be acquitted... the God who will bring

about the appearing of Jesus Christ at just the proper time... the Blessed (i.e., infinitely happy) and *only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords who dwells in light unapproachable whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! AMEN!*"

We are TOTALLY needy and God is infinitely generous. Paul stuffs this truth everywhere he can because THIS is the doctrine of Christ that has been entrusted to Timothy and to the Christian pastor in every age. Guard this Timothy because IT , because HE is the Horse who must go before the cart. He's the Engine, the Juice, the Energy and Power who can infuse us with the right motives and the right desires – that His generosity be seen in us.

God, through His apostles thrusts this Reality and Truth before us again and again. It's the regular pattern – it's what Timothy has to guard – that God is generous, forgiving and the Source of all Life and Goodness and Abundance and Love. To even attempt this life of radical generosity without THIS God and His Son who claims us and owned us before Pilate even at the cost of His own Life – that attempt is futile and ends in envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions and constant friction.

It is ONLY as we are HITCHED to the engine of grace of Christ and of the infinitely generous God who dwells in unapproachable light that this Life of good works and generosity is possible... SO HOW?

Well, we hitch our Cart of Demands to the Horse of Grace by faith. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. We believe. We trust. We know God has the freedom of generosity for us.

Every day and many times each day I have to remind myself and then REST in that truth that God loves me (even ME!). And that I am a Child of God and am destined to be generous and completely loving like Jesus Christ Himself. This is the teaching that actually conforms us to godliness... it leads to the character of Jesus.

I take hold of this eternal life to which I was called, I rest and receive. And that's how I HITCH to the Nuclear Reactor of God's ceaseless energy, love and generosity. There is in me, plenty of evidence that I am, as John Newton called us, "A wretch like me!" and YET, what surmounts that evidence is NOT the love I have for God but HIS love that I trust...

Do you tithe to the church to which you belong? I urge that discipline on you because it's a step of faith. It's an exercise in trust. God gives us everything and calls us to pay back 10%. It seems too good to be true but you'll find that will meet you as you HITCH to Him by faith.

Are you inviting people into your home... putting aside time to listen to people... are you becoming rich in good deeds, generous, ready to share – these are all ways that demonstrate faith. It turns out that GIVING is contentment and great gain (6).

To exercise trust in these ways is to say, “Lord, I simply can’t do this... I don’t have it in me... I am afraid I won’t have enough... and you’ll see it is right where God will meet you.

You will know that you're about something real and important and that God is IN it.

You’ll find the freedom of what one friend called, “*Blessed Self Forgetfulness*” and little by little you’ll find your tight fist relaxing and all things from God are yours to enjoy.

## Q U O T E S

The best things in life are free  
But you can keep 'em for the birds and bees

Now, give me money (That's what I want)  
That's what I want (That's what I want)  
That's what I want, yeah (That's what I want)  
That's what I want

— Berry Gordy, “Money (That's What I Want)”; final track on the 1963 Beatles album, *With the Beatles*, and track six on the eponymous 1979 album *The Flying Lizards*

Add the third rule to the two preceding: having, first, gained all you can, and, secondly, saved all you can, and third then “give all you can.” Consider, when the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being, and placed you in this world, He placed you here, not as a proprietor, but a steward: as such He entrusted you, for a season, with goods of various kinds; but the sole property of these still rests in Him, nor can ever be alienated from Him. As you yourself are not your own, but His, such is, likewise, all that you enjoy. Such is your soul and your body, not your own, but God’s. And so is your substance in particular.

— John Wesley, *The Use of Money*, a 1760 sermon on Luke 16.9

As P. T. Forsyth says, “It is an item of faith that we are children of God; there is plenty of evidence in us against it.” The faith that surmounts this evidence and is able to warm itself at the fire of God’s love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness. We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the love we trust.

— Richard Lovelace. *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*