

Introduction

In 1977, country music artist David Allen Coe wrote what would become a celebrated song. It's about a man who worked long and hard at his job for no apparent reward. He became bitter as a result to the point of walking out the door and telling his employer, excuse the crudeness of it, **"Take this job and shove it."**

The fact is that a lot of people out there and in here feel the same way. I know that from the counseling I've done over the years. For one reason or another, they dislike their jobs – so much so that if they didn't need them, they'd walk out the door and tell their employer, **"Take this job and shove it."**

But there's an alternative to that in Colossians 3:22-25. It's to **"Take this job and devote it,"** devote it to Jesus, and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Job Discipleship

Verse 22 reveals to whom Paul is writing, slaves. The gospel of Jesus, with its emphasis on the value of all human beings, appealed to 1st century slaves like a siren's song. Many, as a result, became followers of His. Paul wrote to those who did and told them how they should work. Most of them chafed under the yoke of their masters. But notice what he commanded them to do in verse 22, **"in all things obey those who are your masters on earth."** He went on to explain why they should do that in verse 24, **"It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."**

What Paul said to slaves in the 1st century, he's saying to workers today. It's Jesus whom we serve. Our jobs, in other words, are a matter of discipleship to Him. Please grasp that. Discipleship to Jesus isn't only about religious activities like Bible reading, worship, and prayer. It's about every single aspect of our lives instead, especially our jobs.

I say **"especially"** because our jobs are such a significant part of our lives. Think about it. They're something that we spend almost half

of our waking lives doing. Consequently, if we don't make them places of discipleship to Jesus, we end up running one of the largest areas of our interest and concern on our own. So, make them places of discipleship.

That doesn't mean that we should be the Christian nag-in-residence at work. You know what I'm talking about, what one author calls "**the rigorous upholder of all propriety,**" "**the dead eyed critic of everyone.**" I worked with just such a Christian nag at the Van Wert Post office years ago. He was always whining about what the other carriers were doing – smoking, drinking, cussing, and looking at the *Play Boy* magazines. It didn't work though. The more he whined, the more joy they seemed to take in doing those things.

Job discipleship doesn't mean being a Christian nag at work. What does it mean? Paul tells us in verses 22-25. It's three things.

See the Glory of Our Jobs

First, according to verses 24-25, we see the glory of our jobs.

Some of you have performance evaluations at work. Once a year, your supervisor, manager, or whoever it is, meets with you and tells you how he or she has judged your job performance. He or she informs you that your work exceeds requirements, meets requirements, needs improvement, or is unsatisfactory. Performance evaluations can be a tense time of course, depending on how we've done.

Well, verses 24-25 identify the ultimate performance evaluation. These verses are about what one Bible commentator calls "**future reckoning.**" They teach us four things. First, God scrutinizes how we do our work. Second, He assesses or evaluates our work. Did we do it, verse 17, "**in the name of Jesus,**" that is, how Jesus would have done it if He were we? Third, someday, at judgment, He's going to reveal His assessment to us. And fourth, based on that assessment, He's going to reward or penalize us eternally.

I going to name two jobs and state a fact about them. Fast food cook, flipping hamburgers. Neurosurgeon, removing brain tumors. Fact –

God cares as much about the cook's job as He does the neurosurgeon's. He's going to judge the cook and the neurosurgeon by the same criterion – did they do their jobs as Jesus would have if He were they. And He's going to reward them equally for doing so. The cook will get as much eternal glory for cooking hamburgers in the name of Jesus as the neurosurgeon will get for removing brain tumors in the name of Jesus.

Do you recognize the profound implication of that. It's that there is glory in every job – unless it's immoral of course. No one job is ultimately more important than another. All jobs are eternally and thus equally important.

Back in the 1970's, John Coleman was president of one of America's most prestigious colleges, Haverford College. That job required him to move among a sophisticated and elite society of people. But one year, he took a sabbatical from his academic responsibilities and worked incognito at three blue-collar jobs – ditch digger for sewer lines, dishwasher, and garbage collector. He did that to get perspective on things but ended up giving it as well. We all know that uppity people look down on ditch diggers, dishwashers, and garbage collectors. But Coleman didn't. He taught them instead that there is dignity in the things they do – as much as there is in running one of America's finest colleges. And that they should do those things with a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Economist Thomas Sowell contends that same thing. Sowell often upsets educators. He declares that the microbiology professor's job, for instance, isn't any more important than the transmission repairman's.

Jesus, the final judge, would agree. If both do their work in His name, He will give the transmission repairman as much eternal glory as He will give the microbiology professor.

It's the same for all of us in the work we do and we need to see that. We need to see the glory of our job.

Do Our Jobs With All Our Might

Job discipleship means a second thing. We do our jobs with all our

might, as Solomon says it in Ecclesiastes 9:10.

That's the gist of a phrase and an adverb in verses 22 and 23. The phrase is "**with sincerity of heart,**" which refers to a will that bears up under God's scrutiny. The adverb is "**heartily,**" which refers to a will that is wholly focused. That phrase and word teach us that we must do our jobs with all our might. That doesn't mean we allow them to become our life. That is a tragic mistake that destroys our family and soul. It does mean that we do them in sweat, intelligence, and the power of God. That is, we do them the best that we possibly can. And beyond that, we routinely sacrifice our own desires and comfort for them.

I've had a lot of jobs over the years, all the way from peeling potatoes and loading furnaces to practicing law and preaching. And I've always followed four rules in all of them. #1 – give 100% effort 100% of the time. #2 - never be late for work. #3 – never miss work because I don't feel like working. And #4 – go the extra mile (do more than is expected or required). I set those rules and I've followed them. I've never once, for instance, called in sick when I wasn't sick, not once. In fact, I've only missed one day of work in my entire life because of illness, in July of 1969.

You get the point. We must do our jobs with all our might. We aren't spiritual if we don't.

Writer and playwright Dorothy Sayers addresses that very issue in her book *Creed or Chaos*. She writes about a drunken carpenter getting saved. She notes that Christians would certainly tell him to stop getting drunk and to start attending church. That's fine, she says, as long as they also tell him, "**The very first demand that his religion makes on him is that he should make good tables.**" What use is his piety in church attendance, she asks, if he insults God by making bad tables?

She's right you know. The very first job I ever had was peeling potatoes in a restaurant. I was a professing Christian then and would make two observations in that regard. First, if I didn't pray, read my Bible, and go to church, I was not a good Christian. And second, if I

didn't peel those potatoes with all my might, I wasn't a good Christian.

Doing our jobs with all our might is as spiritual a matter as reading the Bible, praying, and going to church are. So let's do them with all our might!

Do Our Jobs for God

There's a third thing job discipleship means. We do our jobs for God. That's Paul's primary point in this text. Notice how he exhorts us to work. Verse 22 – **“not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.”** And verse 23 – **“as for the Lord rather than for men.”**

The word **“men”** in both verses refers to the masters of the slaves. Slaves had two basic concerns when it came to their masters. The first was that they continue to feed, clothe, and shelter them. The second was that they not beat or even kill them, which Roman law allowed them to do. So, almost all slaves worked merely to please their masters and thus be fed, clothed, and sheltered, and not be beaten or killed. They worked, in other words, for their own personal gain.

And so do the vast majority of people today. The basic motivation that directs why and how they work is to get personal gain. That gain might be financial (making money to live), or psychological (being made happy and fulfilled), or social (getting status or praise). Whatever the personal gain they want is, the primary reason they work is to get it.

But that isn't the primary reason we who are friends of Jesus work. As verses 22-23 make clear, we work primarily for God's gain, not ours.

That presupposes that our work actually benefits God, which it does, or at least it can, in two ways. One way is that it pleases Him when we work with all our might. It delights Him. Which means logically that it displeases Him, disgusts Him, when we don't. The other way is that it glorifies Him when we work with all our might. It causes others to esteem him. Knowing our Christian witness, how we work causes them to hold Him in high or at least higher regard. Those then are the two ways

our work can benefit God. It can please and glorify Him.

So, that's why we work. Don't get me wrong. We do work for personal gain as I defined it and there's nothing wrong with that. We need to make money to live and we need to be happy and fulfilled. But that motivation is secondary to our controlling motivation – to please and glorify God.

An extraordinary painting illustrates this for us. This painting shows an old shoemaker sitting at his workbench, his hands folded and his head bowed in prayer. As he prays, a beam of light coming from the ceiling is shining down on him, which represents the presence of God. And ascending up that beam of light to God is a stream of shoes.

The painting's message is clear. The shoemaker worked for God. Constantly aware of the divine presence around him as he worked, he carefully crafted each of the shoes he made as a sacred gift to God.

A similar picture could be painted of you. If you're a cook at Burger King, it would be Whoppers ascending to God. If you're a janitor, it would be clean toilets. If you're an insurance agent, it would be life insurance policies. If you're an attorney, it would be motions and briefs. If you're a mother of toddlers, it would be clean diapers. If you're a mechanic, it would be repaired cars, and so on.

So no matter what your job is, do it for God. Do it primarily for His gain and only secondarily for yours.

Conclusion

I close with a statistic I read. 60% of American workers are dissatisfied with their jobs. Let me ask you a question. Are you one of that 60%? If so, one option you have is to say, "**Take this job and shove it.**" It's to change jobs. But if that's not best or even possible, you have another option. It's to say, "**Take this job and devote it – to Jesus.**" It's to see the glory of your job, to do it with all your might, and to do it for God. Take this job and devote it. You'll be satisfied with it, no matter what it is, if you do.