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FOREWORD

In this Faculty Bulletin Pat Graham's study of Chronicles reminds us of God's concern for congruence between faith and life--integrity. Rick Marrs tells us that Christian integrity expresses itself not merely in religious exercises but in just and merciful conduct. David Worley and James Thompson explore the relation between faith and specific areas of life. Worley looks at the relationship between Christianity and the marketplace within the frame of Pauline thought. Thompson recalls Tertullian's pointed question (What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?) with particular reference to the arts--specifically, literature and theater. The concluding article reminds us that character and conduct are formed by our communities. It raises the issue of the impact of modernity upon the Christian community.

A word of appreciation is due my colleagues on the faculty the Institute for Christian Studies for their cooperation in presenting these essays. Special thanks are due to Mrs. Nancy Tindel, faculty secretary, for her help in preparing this issue of the Faculty Bulletin.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

OCCUPATIONS AND PREOCCUPATIONS IN CHRIST*

By David Worley

Every business has an effective policy. This policy or course of action can be found in written and unwritten forms. The latter, unwritten form can be mediated to the employee in various ways, from stories told about the boss, to jokes told about the competition, to informal peer pressure at coffee breaks. Whether in these informal oral traditions or in a printed handbook, a business reflects and evolves a policy.

The Christian in the business world should be concerned about business policy. In sanctioning an organization and procedures, a written business policy inevitably supports and encourages a cluster of dominant images and hierarchy of values.¹ Even the unwritten policy which one gradually learns as an employee encourages certain attitudes and dispositions toward self and others.² Indeed, the operative

*While this paper was prompted by invitation to the Christian Scholars Conference 1983, it has been written with a view to a larger, somewhat different audience. It is intended as a resource paper for Christians in the business world who aspire to worship God in their occupations. It is, however, a resource paper limited to a consideration of only one portion of scripture, Paul's letters and life.

policy in a business can contribute substantially to a person's sense of identity as he/she begins to measure personal worth and fulfillment in terms of the images and values elevated in the rhythm of business activity.

The person in Christ and in the business world should, therefore, be concerned about the business policy because business policy is concerned about the kind of person the employee is, even to the point of supporting or discouraging certain character traits. Although the Christian owner or manager may be the only one in a position to establish and change business policy, the Christian employee must be no less aware of the forces which vie for the ambitions and imagination of the heart.

This interrelationship of business policy and personal character may sound ominous and threatening. It may be. Yet some of the cardinal virtues of Wall Street, honesty, dependability, loyalty, politeness, virtues frequently encouraged in business policy, do not sound on the surface antithetical to life in Christ.³ One can, of course, imagine situations in which employee loyalty and dependability begin to contravene allegiance to the Lord Jesus but such is not necessarily the case.

How to best understand and deal with the formulations and power of policy has become a topic of much discussion the past decade in many professional and graduate schools. In his recent survey of Christian ethics (1982), Edward Long devotes an entire

chapter under “New Frameworks” to “Ethics in Vocational and Policy-Making Settings.”⁴ Our concern here, however, is not to report what philosophers and ethicists have said about business policy but rather to listen as Christians to the available resources in scripture for advice on how to think and talk about life in Christ and life in the business world, more particularly to read Paul’s letters and hear his autobiography for instruction on how a Christian should proceed in his/her occupation under the influence of business policy. To do this, we shall first consider the few remarks Paul makes about occupations and other economic matters. Then we shall turn to see what Paul might have recommended as the Christian’s pre-occupations in the marketplace.

Occupations

After his conversion, C. S. Lewis questioned whether his own occupation in life, as a broker in the literature of our culture, was really worth pursuing in view of salvation in Christ: “If it [culture] is a thing of so little value, how are you justified in spending so much of your life on it?”⁵

In the World. Certainly the question Lewis raised about his own profession has been echoed numerous times by other believers about their own vocations. What occupational pursuit or other life commitment (e.g., marriage, cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35) doesn’t seemingly divide one’s devotions? The dilemma, of course, is part of the larger issue of the Christian’s life in the world. It is the very subject of H. Richard

Niebuhr's classic Christ and Culture in which Niebuhr types the various responses Christians have taken toward life in human society.

Some of Paul's words do sound to us today like calls for separation from the world:

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:6-8).

Yet in other passages Paul clarifies that separation from the world is not intended:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world or the greedy and robbers or idolaters since then you would need to go out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:9, 10).⁶

“In the world” then what occupations may be pursued? Are some more or less suitable for Christians? Where Paul does mention occupations, in his letters to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul's encouragement to them to “work with their hands” arises first of all from his ever present concern to ensure brotherly love and internal cohesion in the church, and at the same time protect the church from any unnecessary social reproach brought on from outsiders. Not just at Thessalonica but apparently elsewhere as well, Paul made such instruction for the church's welfare a regular feature of his initial teaching to newly established churches (cf. “as we charged you,” 1 Thess 4:11).

What Paul feared, perhaps, was that the church, as brotherly love did increase (1 Thess. 4:9, 10), might be perceived by the outsider in its group cohesion (“to

aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs,” 4:11) as anti-social, if not haters of mankind. Such slander had befallen the Epicureans who had formed communities extolling the virtue of “withdrawing into leisure with one’s friends.”⁷ To counteract this, Paul expected the Christians to engage in occupational interaction with outsiders (“so that you may command the respect of outsiders,” 4:12a).

A secondary reason for Paul’s encouragement to work is in order that as few as possible within the church will be in financial need (“and be dependent on nobody” 4:12b). Some in Thessalonica refused to discipline themselves to work (2 Thess. 3:11). Paul has to charge the church “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” to keep away from such undisciplined Christians (3:6). At the same time Paul has to exhort the church to not let such behavior lead to a weariness in well doing (3:13), i.e. a lack of support for those really in need.

Paul does mention a particular kind of occupation to the Thessalonians, handwork. This was, of course, Paul’s own occupation (“we labor, working with our own hands” 1 Cor. 4:12). Luke, in Acts 18:3, reveals his more specific trade as tent making, or perhaps better, leatherworking.⁸

Was then Paul recommending manual work as the most suitable occupation for the Thessalonian Christians? The question is not really as ludicrous as it might

sound. The suitability of occupations was a topic of discussion among many Hellenistic moralists and philosophers. It is true that many moralists looked down on craftsmen and tradesmen but there were others like Musonius Rufus and Dio Chrysostom who recommended handwork.⁹ For Paul to encourage “working with hands” in view of the outsider’s opinion means evidently that the outsider would take no social offense at hand labor. Indeed the outsiders who themselves were probably artisans, shopkeepers and tradesmen hardly despised their own jobs, otherwise their tombstones which have come down to us would not have so boldly advertised their occupations.¹⁰

Perhaps Paul meant by “work with hands” no more than “doing honest work” (cf. Eph. 4:28). However, it was probably the case that more of the Thessalonian Christians fit into the category of handworkers than any other. In a recent careful survey of the individuals mentioned in Paul’s letters and their social level, Wayne Meeks concludes that “the ‘typical’ Christian, the one who most often signals his presence in the letters by one or another small clue, is a free artisan or small trader. Some even in those occupational categories had houses, slaves, the ability to travel and other signs of wealth.”¹¹

Paul, of course, could maximize his occupation in handcrafts, to the Thessalonians as a living example of the exhortation to manual work (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9), to the Corinthians as a man fatigued, in contrast to the elevated self understanding of some Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:8-13) and in his forgoing financial support as a living example of bypassing “rights” in the interest of love (1 Cor. 9).

But these pedagogical uses of his occupation do not explain Paul's decision to engage in leatherworking. Perhaps it was his father's occupation to which he was apprenticed. Even then one must think that Paul's decision to stay with it involved other factors. The most attractive explanation is that this occupation provided Paul with considerable flexibility. He could pick up his knives and sewing awl and move to the next town and headquarter in the neighborhood of other leatherworkers, like Priscilla and Aquilla, and start work. The workshop itself, in the daily traffic of customers and co-workers, was a good place for conversation, and certainly Paul used such opportunities as an apostle of Christ Jesus.

We, therefore, have no record of Paul advising those first urban Christians concerning more and less suitable occupations. Aside from dishonest pursuits (e.g., thievery, Eph. 4:28), Paul apparently addressed and accepted Christians in their various occupations. Surprisingly, his only real qualifications were in view of the outsider (1 Thess. 4:12; cf. Col. 4:5). Occupational interaction with the outsiders could prevent some misimpressions of this new group of believers as being isolationists and anti-social. One might also detect in Paul's regard for the outsider's opinion some recognition of a norm of decent occupational/economic behavior valued even in the buying and selling in the world. After all, as in the collection for the Jerusalem saints, Paul aimed at what was honorable "not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:21).

What we have suspected as implicit in Paul's address to handworkers in Thessalonica, Paul makes explicit in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24:

“Each person should continue in that calling into which he was called. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't worry about it. But if, indeed you become manumitted, by all means [as a freedman] live according to [God's calling] Each one should continue to live in accord with his calling [in Christ] in the sight of God.”¹²

Speaking here not of occupation, but of a legal and social status, slavery, Paul indicates that a person's calling to salvation in Christ does not alienate one from his/her situation or status in the world but rather challenges the believer to live faithfully right where he/she is.

Paul, in fact, in two extended exhortations does challenge slaves, and to a lesser degree owners, to faithfulness in their respective status (Eph. 6: 5-9; Col. 3:22--4: 1; cf. 1 Tim. 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9, 10). It is in these exhortations that we have the closest analogies in Paul's letters to anything like advice we might seek on employer/employee relations in our own world.

Employee/Employer. The context for these exhortations is in itself revealing. The slave/master relationship occurs in Paul as one of three pairs of relationships, the other two being wife/husband, children/father. At least since Aristotle these same three pairs of relationships had been variously discussed by philosophers as constitutive of the

household, and in turn fundamental for the constitution of the state. Some, in fact, added a fourth element to the discussion, viz. the acquisition and utilization of money.¹³ It is only in his discussion of riches in 1 Timothy 6, in a letter which itself has considerable concern for the stability of home and church, that Paul may perhaps be reflecting the pattern of adding a fourth element to the discussion of household economy.

In both Ephesians and Colossians Paul takes up the three pairs of household relationships as part of a larger exhortation to behave as children of light (Eph. 4:22--5:21) putting on the new nature (Col. 3:5-17). Paul's discourse on these relationships within this broader context, at once, shifts the significance of household etiquette away from any implications for the political realm, to its significance in reflecting the image of God (Eph. 4:24; 5:1; Col. 3:10). This has its own implications for slave and master as we shall see.

Moreover there is a corollary reason for Paul's attention to household conduct. In both letters Paul immediately precedes his address to the household members by talking about activity in the church's assembly (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16, 17); then he proceeds to his exhortations to the household members. What is the connection? Apparently Paul is saying that the new life in Christ and in assembly does not erase the structured relationships of the household (cf. 1 Cor. 14:29-35; 1 Tim. 2:1--3:15). Certainly something radically new has happened. Paul has already said to the Colossians, "here

there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all” (3:11). But putting on the new nature does not mean a household “free for all.” And while slave may be a brother in Christ to master, and slave may admonish a master in “psalm, hymn and spiritual song” still the slave is slave and master is master. Paul goes so far to say that the slave’s service to master is “doing the will of God” (Eph. 6:6).

“Setting one’s mind on things that are above” (Col. 3:2) does not mean then forgetting things at home. In fact, quite to the contrary! The slave and master in putting on the new nature are to be renewed after the image of the Creator in and through their very duties and relationships as slave and master. With this broader context in mind, we may now look in closer detail at Paul’s hortatory utterances to slave and master.

In his words to slaves, Paul is concerned with the attitude and perspective toward the service. Through a series of prepositional phrases, Paul characterizes the attitude toward master and work: with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, from the soul, with enthusiasm. What is striking, however, is the perspective Paul urges: view your service as to the Lord, not to earthly masters. No longer is it only the service to the deprived which is service to Jesus (Matt. 25:40); now service to the earthly master is service to the Lord in heaven.

As for the slave, so for an employee today such a perspective is not attained overnight. The quality and earnestness of job performance is in our world considered a

function of promotional opportunity and pay scale. Even for the slave, who could look forward to and expect manumission after a number of years of labor, that work for the master could be performed which would be most easily seen by the master.¹⁴ Over against these human incentives, Paul urges a heavenly perspective and a heavenly incentive.

Paul, of course, is not sanctioning all labor “as to the Lord.” The perspective itself is a guard against such a notion. Engagement in dishonesty can hardly be considered as to the Lord. Paul explicitly warns against misappropriation in Titus 2:9. In his letter to Philemon (v. 18), Paul recognizes Onesimus’ past wrong to Philemon. Paul presupposes in his exhortation to the slaves that the labor is honest (Col. 3:25).

Taking such a heavenly perspective seriously will have its effects. Words of malice and slander on the job will be put away not only because service is to the Lord but also because the employee bears the image of the Creator to the outsider (Col. 3:8-10; 4:5, 6; 1 Tim. 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9, 10). Paul intends also that the work be done “with enthusiasm” (Eph. 6:7). This may be the hardest word for an employee to hear, much less understand. Boredom has become a word so associated with work. As one high school student said about her job, “It’s fun for a while but then it becomes a drag.” Yet Paul’s words to slaves address the attitude and energy in work. Paul encourages without equivocation “work from the soul” (Col. 3:23), with a view not to earthly but

heavenly incentive: “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the repayment in inheritance” (v. 24).

A cynic might wonder if slave owners had paid Paul to write those words in his letters. They sound so beneficial to the master. Certainly Paul hoped masters would receive benefits (Eph. 6:7), but his words were indeed spoken to enrich the slaves’ life in Christ.

Paul’s explicit directions to the masters are by contrast much briefer (Eph. 6:8, 9; Col. 4:1). Though he does warn against threats to slaves (Eph. 6:9), one may assume that in the first century most slave owners treated their slaves well.¹⁵ What Paul assumes as the fundamental difference for the Christian master is the incentive for treatment. While a secular master’s treatment of his slaves might be in view of protecting his investment, Paul encourages just and fair treatment because both master and slave alike are answerable to a heavenly Master (Col. 4:1).

Every employer in our world must wrestle with what for his business is just and fair treatment of employee, competitor and public. Christian and non-Christian employer alike share a common search for justice and fairness. Courses in business ethics in universities dwell at length on the implications of these twin virtues for every phase of business life. What is unique for the Christian employer, however, is the persistent effect on employee relations of remembering a heavenly Lord who forgave in Christ and

remembering a Christ who loved and gave himself up (Eph. 4:32--5:2). We shall return to these images later.

One of the real challenges for the Christian employer is to formulate written policy and set the tone for unwritten policy while keeping in mind the "Lord who is in heaven." Business policy, as we said in the beginning of our study, reinforces values and inevitably gives support to character traits. To take an example, a policy either through neglect of statement or by elevation of company loyalty may tend to diminish concern for family. No one need document the effect upon family endurance of the "career mystique." The Christian employer, however, who knows that the Lord in heaven jealously guards the household (cf. Titus 1:10-16), will seek policy which positions the business properly.

The slave owner, of course, would not have separated household from business as we have so easily done. When we think household, we think immediate family. For those in the first century, however, household could also include "slaves, freedmen, servants, laborers, and sometimes business associates and tenants."¹⁶ In short, household included business employees. Paul's practice of evangelizing households thus involved much more than reaching an immediate family; it potentially touched the lives of many of those economically dependent upon the head of the house. Certainly today many employers view their employees as part of their household and under their care and protection. Paul's practice of reaching for the whole household is a challenge for the Christian

employer, to sensitively win employees whether with or without a word by the character of life and the fruit of light (Eph. 5:9).

Preoccupations

In all this we should not hear Paul implying that occupational choice does not matter. Paul probably stayed with leatherworking because he felt it gave him a certain financial independence and mobility. Nevertheless, the particular American Christian's preoccupation with occupational choice cannot be paralleled with Paul's concerns. For Paul what must be discussed is not the kind of occupation but the kind of person one is. It is not the particular decision, but the character of the decision maker. It is not the occupation but the pre-occupation.

Already we have seen in his exhortations to slave and master that Paul is concerned about preoccupations; both slave and master must constantly remember the Master who is in heaven. To think about business in terms of preoccupation rather than occupation is to take a different trail than the one we have so far explored. It means that we must settle upon fundamental Christian preoccupations and see how these take shape in the business world.

But what would these fundamental preoccupations be for Paul? To the same Thessalonian Christians, whom we have already mentioned in our study, Paul gives thanks that faith, love and hope have already had an effect in their lives (1 Thess. 1:3);

later Paul speaks of this same triad as providing protection (5:8). In some seven other contexts in his letters, Paul mentions faith, love and hope (Col. 1:4, 5; Eph. 1:15, 18; Rom. 12:6, 9, 12; 1 Cor. 13:13; Rom. 5:1-5; Gal. 5:5, 6; Eph. 4:2-5). Twice as frequently Paul mentions faith and love together, hope often being included in faith. Of course our ears are most familiar with the ring of the triad in 1 Corinthians 13:13, where love is placed in the final position.

For Paul this triad was an apt way of speaking about what motivates and explains Christian behavior. Speaking of faith, hope and love in the business world may sound strange, stranger yet to the outsider, but as fundamental Christian preoccupations they must have their effect in our occupations. We shall begin with faith but limit ourselves to discussing two aspects of faith, reconciliation with God and the cross of Christ.

Faith. “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Sometimes I would just as soon relate to business associates from a purely human point of view. Then I could take with utmost seriousness the barrage of newsletters and seminars which offer advice and promises for curing all the ills of employee and management relations. But my faith in Jesus constrains me to think differently. Outside of Christ people are estranged and alienated from God (Col. 1:21). And such a condition inevitably produces hostility, enmity and tensions in

human relationships. As I said, I wish they could be fixed by a little dose of “Management 301.” But people really are sin sick and alone, without God, and no amount of competence or busyness or cosmetic activity can fill that void of separation from God.

The policies which the Christian employer can shape over time are not thereby rendered futile or meaningless. Policy can be formulated which may very well inhibit the growth of sin in an organization. And healthy images and values can be fostered through company policy. We should never underestimate the power of holiness in the life of the believer (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14). Just as the handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul’s workshop were carried away and spread health to the diseased (Acts 19:12), so also metaphorically the Christian in business can be healthy leaven in the lump. C. S. Lewis finally came to terms with his own profession by concluding that his elevation of certain values in literature could perhaps bring people to the brink of faith. Perhaps every Christian employer should pray that his business be like the ministry of John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Lord.

The Christian, however, is not immune from hearing the call “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). While reconciled, the believer must continue to treasure the peace with God. The business world has its powerful sirens of peace, claiming to fill the void of the heart and to perfect personal identity. The magnet of accumulating the controlling things

can too quickly draw the heart. The lie may be believed that who I am is what I possess; the more I have the more I am.¹⁷ But the call “Be reconciled to God” is a sharp reminder that greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5).

The reconciliation with God, we confess, has occurred through the cross of Christ (Eph. 2:16). As part of the fabric of Christian praise, we think of the cross, perhaps most often, as a “fountain, free to all, a healing stream.” The cross is more a source than a pattern for the Christian’s life.

Yet, in Paul’s letters, the cross is also understood as a model and an explanation for Christian behavior. Paul calls the Philippians to the memory of Jesus’ death on a cross as an incentive to their own expressions of selflessness in community life (Phil. 2:8). Paul understands his own sufferings as conforming to Jesus’ death (Phil. 3:10).

Our faith in a crucified Messiah then cannot be without its consequences in the business world. We do not mean that a Christian business person is out in the world seeking situations of humiliation, suffering and ridicule. Paul is quite clear that he desires his children to live peaceably in the world. Nevertheless, the cross stands at odds with traditions of power and prestige so often honored, so cultivated, so sought by many in business life. Paul makes this especially clear to the Corinthians many of whom had become bloated with a false sense of superiority because of whom they knew (1:12) and what they knew (8:1). They had taken the grounds for confidence and for personal

identity in their world and made these the criteria and valuation for Christian identity. Paul though calls them back to the message which had given them life in the first place. And that message centered on a cross. The confidence and personal identity supplied by the cross, Paul reckons, is at odds with the cultures' measurement of power and success.

The cross in the business world means for the Christian an adjustment in attitude toward fellow employees, clients and competitors. The weak and powerless are neither joked about nor trampled in the rush to sell more product. The cross in business is not a predictor of income or loss, but a general critique of what makes for success. The Christian in business can be legitimately pleased in the job but not per se because of a larger net. The Christian's sense of worth must be firmly placed in the Lord of glory who was crucified. "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31).

Hope. At first reading hope might appear as fairly antithetical to any effort in the business world. After all, Paul told the Corinthians:

"the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:29-31).

Yet in the words we have heard Paul speak to slaves, hope is an incentive to conscientious vigor at work: “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not man, knowing that from the Lord you will receive your inheritance as your reward” (Col. 3:23, 24).

We must carefully interpret 1 Corinthians 7. Certainly Paul is not advocating withdrawal from trade and commerce nor lethargy (if not hypocrisy) in life’s routines. What he is advocating is a thorough perspective toward the relationships and activities of life. This perspective, in brief, is that no routine activity nor occurrence in this world should claim our hearts (7:35). Paul’s immediate warrant for such a perspective is the non-permanence of the world. Paul presses for this perspective in 1 Corinthians 7 because he wants to substitute this viewpoint for one held by some Corinthians (those with ascetic tendencies) that sexuality meant defilement. No, Paul says, the point in celibacy or marriage, tears or laughter, trade or commerce, is that devotion to the Lord be maintained, with as few distractions as possible.

Paul thought, however, that one could possess without being possessed: “As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). The transitory nature of the world did not mean that life was melancholy. Possessions, whatever the extent, could be enjoyed in thankfulness to God. Paul refuses to set hope

against life in the world. In fact, in three letters concerned with ascetic Christians, Paul is careful to commend both life in the body in God's creation and the hope which is on reserve for the Christian (1 Cor. 6:12--7:31; 15; Col. 1:5, 15-20; 2:16-23; 3:23; 1 Tim. 4:1-10; 6:17-19).

The shadow that hope casts on life is not then for Paul a denial of marriage or laughter or commerce or possessions. Rather hope is a monitor on the heart, that no ambition or investment be ultimate, other than hoping in the God who richly provides. Paul does warn against the craving for money and the desire to be rich (1 Tim. 6:9, 10) because these can lead to idolatry. And Paul's insistence that the form of this world is passing away can only give us pause in our American dash for growth, growth, growth. But the Christian's hope is not poison to hearty labor; it is rather an antidote to love for the world.

It is as well the assurance that provides steadiness in the midst of hardship and suffering. In Romans 8:18-25, Paul elaborates the salvation mediated in hope. The sufferings, incomparable to glory, may be here the sufferings expected before the End. But is it not possible that they are also the hardships and sufferings experienced in toil because of the curse on creation (Gen. 3:17). Paul speaks of his own exhausting toil in his lists of hardships (1 Cor. 4:11-13; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27) and these he counts as slight in comparison with the load of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). Hope then is more than a monitor that

regulates ambition. It is also a magnet that leads the wearied heart through hardship to see a promised glory.

Love. “The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died” (2 Cor. 5:14). Paul says that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge, even the knowledge of the immeasurable cosmic dimensions (Eph. 3:18, 19). Yet when Paul speaks of the love of Christ it is in an economy of words with utter simplicity and clarity: “He loved and gave himself up for us” (Eph. 5:2; Gal. 2:20; 2 Thess. 2:16). The love of Christ is not a sentimental thing to Paul; as he says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, one has died. And if this love constrains Paul, it means that he must die: “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2: 20).

The love born of such love is not natural. Natural love is preferential; it prefers to love one but not another. Paul says God’s love is radically different: “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Because such a love is so un-natural to us, Jesus had to command us to love.

In the business world it is too easy to care about some and not care at all for others. It is easy to take offense in the stress of competition and be tempted to seek some subtle form of revenge. Yet the love of Christ and Christ’s command to love constrains me. Once again I must die to my strong need to defend myself or strike out against someone. I must care about the disadvantaged as well as those who might bring me advantage.

But there is another side to Paul's words about love and it is surprising. The overwhelming number of times Paul calls upon his churches to love, it is love toward the saints (e.g., Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; 1 Thess. 4:9; 2 Thess. 2:13); only once or twice does he mention love more generally (1 Thess. 3:12; Rom. 13:8-10). This has enormous significance for one's occupation.

It is clear that Paul desired that the local congregation be the primary peer group for his children, that the local house-church be the decisive social reality for the Christian way of life. What made this difficult was the presence of an equally strong peer group, the group at work. This was perhaps even more intense in Paul's time than in our own because not only did people of the same occupation work closely together, they usually lived in the same neighborhoods. In addition there were all kinds of craft associations formed not so much for economic advantages as social, to pursue honors among themselves, to share meals together, to have burial insurance.¹⁸

It remains a dilemma, if not a challenge, in our own time, to love the brethren and mind the store. Practically, at the simple level of time and energy expenditure, commitment to the local church will mean time and energy taken away from work. And yet Paul's charge to love the saints is straightforward and unequivocal. The conclusion is unavoidable that business loyalties must be limited loyalties. Every Christian in business will be faced with the choice whether to make the church his/her business associates the primary peer group.

There is another effect on business life in heeding the charge to love the brethren. The church can become the primary training ground for learning to understand and learning to express the love of Christ. Enduring, persistent, constant love is learned in the church because often the brethren are the “hardest” to love. No wonder that Paul brackets his description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 with “endurance” (cf. Eph. 4:2). One learns in the church the disciplined freedom of serving one another through love (Gal. 5:13-15). It is Philemon’s love for the brethren which Paul knows will make a final difference in Philemon’s viewpoint and handling of his personal economics (Philemon 5, 7, 9). And in our own occupations, how we care and treat others in business will no doubt be influenced by how we have loved each other in church.

Occupation and Preoccupation

The task remains for me as an owner and employer to formulate policy as consistent as possible with my Christian preoccupations. The task need not be a solitary one. I have the company of those, of like mind, who honor the servant Jesus. And we have a fellow worker in the person of Paul.

Imagine walking into his workshop, in the neighborhood of the leatherworkers. There he sits on his stool, bent over, cutting the leather here, sewing pieces together. We look around and, yes, there on the walls of his shop hang four plaques. What do they say?

WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED . . . THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD.

THIS MOMENTARY AFFLICTION PREPARES AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY BEYOND ALL COMPARISON.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINS ME.

I wonder.

Notes

- ¹ For a perceptive discussion of respective values and images honored in the business community and Christian community, see Oliver Williams and John Houck, Full Value: Cases in Christian Business Ethics (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 23-75.
- ² “As we worked on research of our excellent companies, we were struck by the dominant use of story, slogan, and legend as people tried to explain the characteristics of their own great institutions. All the companies we interviewed, from Boeing to McDonald’s, were quite simply rich tapestries of anecdote, myth and fairy tale. And we do mean fairy tale . . . these stories, myths, and legends appear to be very important, because they convey the organization’s shared values or culture.” Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman, In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies (New York: Harper & Row, 1982) 75.
- ³ In fact, at one level, in hortatory utterances which Paul could have heard spoken by his fellow Jews and Hellenistic moralists, Paul encourages characteristics in economics not unlike those we have isolated as Wall Street virtues: honesty, industriousness, contentment and generosity (Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11; Phil. 4:11-13; 2 Cor. 9:8). See Nils Dahl, “Paul and Possessions,” in Studies in Paul (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 22-24.

- 4 Edward Long, A Survey of Recent Christian Ethics (New York: Oxford University, 1982) 141-155. From the Hastings Center Project on the Teaching of Ethics in Higher Education has come the booklet by Joel Fleishman and Bruce Payne, Ethical Dilemmas and the Education of Policymakers (1980).
- 5 C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture" in Christian Reflections (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 12.
- 6 Paul's previous letter to Corinth may have contained exhortations not unlike Eph. 5:6-8. See Nils Dahl, "The Church at Corinth" in Studies in Paul, pp. 56-57.
- 7 Quotation from Philodemus the Epicurean (Peri Oikodomias 23); see discussion in Abe Malherbe's Social Aspects of Early Christianity (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1977) 23-27.
- 8 For the various meanings of skenopoios, Ron Hock, The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 20-21.
- 9 Hock, Tentmaking, pp. 35-49. It is difficult to assess to what extent the various trades despised in the rabbinic material (see Jeremias, Jerusalem, pp. 303-312) were despised in the first century. Certainly some occupations received criticism; see Martin Hengel, trans. John Bowden, Judaism and Hellenism (London: SCM, 1974) 153.
- 10 Examples in Ramsay MacMullen, Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284 (New Haven: Yale, 1974) 202 n. 105.
- 11 Meeks mentions that the extreme top (e.g., landed aristocrats, senators, equites) and bottom (e.g., peasants, hired agricultural day laborers) of the Greco-Roman social scale are missing in his impressionistic sketch of Paul's churches. It is the levels in between which are well represented, a fair cross-section of urban society; The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven: Yale, 1983) 51-73.
- 12 Using the translation which concludes the work of Scott Bartchy First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7 :21 (SBLDS 11; Missoula: Scholars, 1973) 183.

- ¹³ See David Balch, Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter (SBLMS 26; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981) 33-49.
- ¹⁴ Bartchy, Slavery, pp. 82-87.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 67-72.
- ¹⁶ Malherbe, Social, p. 69; Meeks, Urban Christians, p. 30; Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 208-216.
- ¹⁷ This line of thought is elaborated in Luke Johnson's Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 37-70.
- ¹⁸ MacMullen, Social Relations, pp. 73-80.

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