

Sermon Transcript

May 17, 2015



Five Hats We Wear

Sons and Servants

Romans 8:12-17 and Galatians 5:13-26

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on May 17, 2015, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Romans 8:12-17

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Galatians 5:13-26

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Introduction

I was really struck by something I read in Tim Keller's book *Every Good Endeavor*, a book on work and faith. He was challenging a common cliché we tend to hear regarding work. And it goes like this, "Nobody ever gets to the end of their life and wishes they had spent more time at the office." It is a statement that recognizes the common tension we all feel when it comes to balancing out what seems to be our competing priorities and obligations in life. For example, there may be the "workaholic" who may possibly sacrifice his marriage or his children for the sake of his career, and it is a poor substitute, no doubt. Your co-workers are going to come and go throughout your life and the same goes for your boss. But your family, that is the constant in your life. So with your family gathered around your deathbed, you are not going to have this fleeting thought that says, "I wish I would have spent more time at the office." And so yes, Keller would say, this statement "makes good sense, of course, up to a point."¹

Here is the limitation to that statement. It relegates "work" and "the office" and possibly even your "co-workers" to being a necessary evil that compete with "the real important matters and relationships of life." It brings us back to the "pie" we looked at last week. Like a pie, life gets divided up between all these competing values and you are left trying to find balance in life and it is difficult to do because work comes with certain demands you can't always control. As a result, work is then viewed as the "enemy" and "the necessity" that keeps you from the "greater responsibilities of life." But if your life is more like a wheel than a pie and if God is at the hub of the wheel, then work and all the other "spokes" of life are pretty much about the same thing. It is about loving God and loving people. The only thing that changes from one "spoke" to the other is the environment where we express God's love. In your job and through your job, you have the opportunity to express your love for God and your love for others by making things and sustaining things and restoring this world that belongs to God.

So Keller suggests you consider a different question. Here it is. "At the end of your life, will you wish that you had plunged more of your time, passion, and skills into work environments and work products that helped people to give and receive more love?"² So the end goal of your work was not about using relationships to accrue more power, wealth or comfort for yourself? Rather, whatever you gained in power, wealth or comfort through your job became a greater platform to serve the end goal of loving others. I guess the question being asked is, "When you get to the end of your life, will you regret that you didn't love more?"

This week I received an email from a gentleman who had been called into the CEO's office the week before and was told that someone from another agency would be

stepping into this person's role and the person who wrote me this email would now be reporting to this individual. Admittedly and understandably, his pride was hurt. And yet at the same time, he had been praying for God to give him a wider opportunity to touch others with God's love and because of this shift in his work he will be less behind the desk and more among people. I appreciated how he was honestly wrestling with both the personal disappointment that came with this news, and yet, at the same time he was seeing greater opportunity to love people through his work. He asked me to pray that his pride would not overshadow the opportunity now set before him. That is love.

Tim Keller tells the story of a woman who had been coming to his church early on in his ministry at Redeemer in Manhattan. He noticed that she would come in and then leave rather quickly. Finally, one Sunday, he was able to catch her before she left that Sunday morning. She was exploring the Christian faith and she was yet to make a commitment to Christ. And so Keller was curious and asked her how she found out about the church. She went on to share how she worked for a company in Manhattan, and not long after she had started there she made a big mistake and she thought she would lose her job over it. To her surprise, her supervisor took full responsibility for it and he received some consequence because of it. This woman said that she was used to supervisors who took credit for good things she had done, but never the blame. She wanted to find out what made him different and after pressing him, he finally said, "I am a Christian. That means among other things that God accepts me because Jesus Christ took the blame for things I have done wrong. He did that on the cross. That is why I have the desire and sometimes the ability to take the blame for others." Keller said, "she stared at him for a few moments and then asked, 'where do you go to church?'"³

So the question goes like this, "At the end of your life, will you wish that you had plunged more of your time, passion, and skills into work environments and work products that helped people to give and receive more love?" Or perhaps the question needs to be asked at a deeper level, "How can I love more?" Or, "What does God's love for me compel me to do?" Or, "Where does this unusual kind of love come from?"

When I put together the outline for this series on "Work and Faith," I decided to follow the outline of a book by Robert Alexander called "*The Gospel-Centered Life at Work.*" One of the things that attracted me to the book was his emphasis on our status in Christ as sons and daughters, servants and stewards. Given that these three things are at the heart of our vision as a church and have been part of our conversation for the past few years, I felt that it was a helpful tool for our conversation on "Work and Faith."

- Who are we? We are sons and daughters, servants and stewards
- What do we do? We love God, love people and make disciples

- How do we do it? Worship, Community and Service

What we do flows from who we are. We are able to love God and love others because of who we are as sons and daughters and servants. And this is not just something to guide us while “down here at the church.” This is a way of life for us, no matter “what spoke on the wheel we are talking about.” So when I saw this applied to our lives at work, I was drawn to it. It helps us to answer the question, “Where does this unusual kind of love come from?” It flows from who we are as “sons and daughters and servants” and it sets the tone for how we approach our work.

Adopted and Indebted

It all starts with the gospel. It all starts with fully understanding the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus. Robert Alexander makes an insightful comment regarding the impact of the gospel on our lives. He writes, “The gospel frees us to not just “do the right thing” in our work, but also to genuinely love God and others . . . Living with God at the center of our lives means that we aim at more than following a code of conduct; God wants us to reflect his character and love while we stand up for what is right.”⁴ To be honest, I think evangelical Christians are more known for trying “to do the right thing” and for our “moral code” than we are for our love. It is not one or the other. It is both together. Are we not told in 1 Corinthians 13 that it is all empty, including moral codes, without love? So in Christ, we are set free to love.

Paul says it this way in Romans 8:13-14. He says that we should not “*live according to the flesh*” but rather we should be “*led by the Spirit.*” In a few moments we will look at Galatians 5 and we will see “the list” of things that constitute “*the flesh*” and the list of things that constitute “*the Spirit.*” But I can “spill the beans” a little bit right now by letting you know that in Galatians 5 we find the “*fruit of the Spirit*” which is “*love.*” But my concern right now is not “the list.” My concern and interest right now is the “cause” or the “reason” why God’s love is able to flow through us. That is the point of Romans 8:12-17. The emphasis of this passage is found in the little word “*for*” found at the beginning of verses 14 and 15. We are to be led by the Spirit “*for*” we are “*sons of God.*” We are to be led by the Spirit “*for*” we “*did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*” It is because we have been adopted into God’s family through faith in Jesus and it is because we are now “*sons of God*” that we are free to love.

When Paul uses the imagery of *adoption* to describe our relationship with God, it is important to understand how adoption was understood and practiced in the Roman culture he is writing to. It was very different than the way we view adoption and the

motive behind modern-day adoption. In our culture, the motive for adopting is often the desire to nurture a child who needs a home. But that was not the motive for adoption in the Roman culture. In fact, in the Roman culture, the adoption of children or infants was very rare. That is because the reason for adoption in Roman culture was not to nurture a child who needed a family, but rather it was to pass one's inheritance along to a son. The lack of a male descendant would be the main motive for adoption in the Roman world. R. W. Lee writes in his book *The Elements of Roman Law*, "In the Roman law and culture of the first century A.D., an affluent but childless adult who wanted an heir, would adopt a post-pubescent male, often a slave, to be his son."⁵ It wasn't always a slave who was adopted. Sometimes a father of a "common family" would willingly give up his son for adoption because through this new family it opened up opportunity he couldn't give to his son.

It is important to recognize that when an adoption would take place in the Roman world, all ties to the previous family would be severed. The one who was adopted was given a new name and a new identity. Even if children were born naturally into this family, the adopted son would have full rights as a natural born son. This means that he would fully share in the inheritance that would be passed down from the father. There was an elaborate ceremony and legal process by which an adoption would take place. During that time, any debts or obligations from being associated with the previous family were wiped clean. William Barclay said, "when the ceremony was complete, in the eyes of the law, the adoptee was a new person. So new . . . that even all debts and obligations connected to his previous family were abolished as if they never existed."⁶ This legal ceremony of adoption was called a *vindicatio*. It is where we get the word "vindicated," which means to "acquit, justify or erase any debt" associated with his past. And then finally, in this culture all the wealth and power was in the father of the home. The Latin phrase was *patria potestas*. When an adoption took place, the adopted son was now under the authority and the possession and the complete provision of the father.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be a slave one day, and then the next day be adopted into a family and be a full fledged son, with all the rights and privileges that came with it? It would completely alter and change a person's life. It wasn't just access to an inheritance that made adoption so life changing. But it also gave access to opportunity. Many of the senators and the ruling class who did not have a son would adopt and therefore their adopted son would now have opportunity to step into positions of influence previously denied to them. I had read a statistic that at one point almost 10% of magistrates and members of the city senate of Pompeii were adoptees.⁷

So can you imagine what was going through the mind of a typical Roman when Paul would use the imagery of adoption to describe our relationship with God through faith

in Jesus? Through Jesus we are brought into a new way of life. We have a new name. We have a new identity. That is why it says in Romans 8:12, “*So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*” Rather, we have a new identity and we are to be “*led by the Spirit.*” “*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*” The old family ties are gone and we now have a new identity in Christ.

In Romans 8:17 it adds, “*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*” We have an inheritance in Jesus that will never fade away. In fact, we are “*fellow heirs with Christ*” who is the “*natural born son of God*” and so all that is given to Jesus is given to us. In the next section in Romans 8, starting in verse 18, we read about how God is going to restore this broken world and all of creation will be set free from the bondage that it was subjected to when man rebelled against God. Included in that future inheritance is the redemption of our bodies. In says in Romans 8:23, “*And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*” So part of this “*inheritance*” that is ours in Christ is the resurrection of our bodies, which has already been given to Christ and will be given to us. And so we can stand at the grave and commit a body to the ground knowing full well that this is not “*the final resting place.*” Through the resurrection of Jesus, death has been defeated and this is our inheritance in Christ, given to us freely by our Father who has adopted us into the family of God!

And furthermore, when one was adopted all previous debts and obligations that came from the previous family were removed. Does not Romans 8 begin with that great statement of assurance, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Through Jesus and his work on the cross, our sins are forgiven. Jesus is our *vindicatio*, our justification. Therefore, when we repent of our sin and rely by faith on what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we are adopted into God’s family and all our sins are forgiven. And as a result, God becomes our Father, our *patria potestas* and therefore we belong to him and we are his children. It reminds me of what John writes in 1 John 3, “*Behold, what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. . . Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. Everyone who thus hopes in him, purifies himself as he is pure.*”

This brings us to one more image that describes our relationship with God. It is the image of a bond-servant. Perhaps you want to ask, “What are we? Sons or Servants? The answer is “yes!” With multiple metaphors you have various pictures being given as to what our relationship with God looks like. But there is some similarity between

being called “sons” and “servants.” By the way, Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude all referred to themselves as “servants” in the opening greeting of many of their letters.

I think of the Old Testament practice when a servant was being set free. It says in Deuteronomy 15, if that servant doesn’t want to leave his master because he loves his master and his master has been good to him, then his master is to pierce the servant’s ear and put a gold ring in it to indicate that he is willing to be a servant for life. And in many ways, that servant becomes a trusted member of that household and he too benefits from the master’s generosity. And so the motivation of the servant is to serve out of gratitude and love. That is what the adopted son and the bond servant have in common. They benefit from the love of the father and the master and they respond in kind because they now belong to the *patria potesta*, the father.

This is why we are free to love in “every spoke of our lives,” including work. Because of God’s love for us through Jesus, we are adopted into the family of God and given all the blessings and privileges that come with it. And so in turn, like a servant and a loyal son, we are free to love. We are secure. We are fully accepted by God through Jesus and the cross. So becoming more like Christ is not just about sinning less, but about responding to God’s grace to love others more.⁸

Five Hats We Wear

So what hat does this point us to? We are looking at “Five Hats We Wear” as followers of Jesus when we walk into the workplace. Today, we discover the third hat we wear.

We already saw through the hat of the Kansas City Royals that we are “Royal Reps” who bear the image of God. And so wherever we go, as Christ is transforming us into his image, we bring the presence of God with us. Last week we saw that we are also “Imitators” of God in our places of work. And so through the hat representing the Minnesota Twins we saw how to imitate God as “twins of heart” and “twins of action.” In our hearts, God is our portion and our power. That allows God to flow through our actions and gives us ability to imitate God in the way we work. We seek to please others, we walk in love, we are filled with joy and we mirror the rhythm of work and rest. In this, we imitate God in our work.

Our third hat we wear comes from the Washington Nationals. This team plays their games in our nation’s capital. With the name “nationals” it is a reminder that we are citizens of this country. We are Americans. We belong to this country. Our citizenship defines us. That is exactly what we find in our passage this morning. We are not only citizens of God’s kingdom, but we belong to God and we are part of God’s family. It is

like the supervisor who took the blame for the mistake of someone under him. When asked why he did it he said, *“I am a Christian.”* God is our Father, our *patria potesta* and therefore we belong to him and we want to reflect his character and love.

Free To Love

In Galatians 5, we have further conversation on the difference between walking *“by the Spirit”* and *“gratifying the flesh.”* Remember, the appeal in Romans 8 to be *“led by the Spirit”* is based on the fact that we are now *“sons”* by virtue of adoption. We need to now reflect our Father’s character. But what are the things of *“the flesh”* and the things of *“the Spirit?”* According to Galatians 5:20, the things of *“the flesh”* include *“enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions and envy.”* This list sounds like the common day experience in the workplace. But for us, that is the old way of life. Instead, now that we have been adopted into the family of God, we are to be led by the Spirit. Therefore, this is what ought to mark us, *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* In fact, Paul puts it this way in Galatians 5:13-14, *“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

So how do we wear this hat, now that we belong to God? We love! We serve! It brings us back to the question we began with this morning. *“At the end of your life, will you wish that you had plunged more of your time, passion, and skills into work environments and work products that helped people to give and receive more love?”* Or perhaps the question needs to be asked at a deeper level, *“How can I love more?”* Or, *“What does God’s love for me compel me to do?”*

Your work is not a necessary evil. It is a *“spoke on the wheel of your life”* and an opportunity for you to love and serve others as one who is led by the Spirit. Because your security is found in that you already belong to God, you are free to love. You are free *“to plunge more of your time, passion and skills into work environments and work products that help people to give and receive love.”* Here are three ways you can freely love Monday to Friday.

You are free to love your neighbors through your work: This is the drum I hope to keep beating through this series. The job you perform is an opportunity for you to freely love your neighbor. Jim Mullin is a pastor and he tells the story of having coffee with a man from his church by the name of Wendell. Wendell had his PhD in biomedical engineering. His company made devices to help doctors detect cancer at an early stage. And yet, Wendell was thinking about making a career change because he didn’t want to

“waste his life.” He said to his pastor, “I want to do something that has real significance where I can glorify God and love people.” And yet, he couldn’t see how he was doing that through his job. Jim Mullin, the pastor, left that conversation somewhat frustrated because he thought that they had conveyed over and over again that all of life is a way to love God. Something had to change to help their church grasp this truth. So they started something called “All of Life Interview.” For five minutes before the sermon, they would interview someone and ask the following questions:

- How would you describe your work?
- How does your work reflect some aspect of God’s work? Do you create, provide, do justice, express compassion, reveal or redeem?
- How does your work give you a unique view to the brokenness of this world?
- How does your work enable you to love and serve others?⁹

These interviews, over time, have helped their congregation embrace the fact that their vocation is integral to God’s mission in this world. It has freed them to love.

You are free to love your neighbors by losing your life: In this series, we have already mentioned the reality that work is not always easy and that there can be dynamics that make work difficult. Lester DeKoster says, “Work can wound and when it does, it may or not be for just a short season.”¹⁰ He goes on to say, “Work can be cross bearing, self denying and life sacrificing; because work is following the Lord in ways of service, be that in ways hidden to all but God alone demanding sacrifices only the doer can know.”¹¹ The fundamental call of the Gospel is service to others and thus to God. It is a not a detour from the problems of this world. And so, because we belong to God and are ultimately serving our *patria potestas* we are free to love by losing our lives and by dying to ourselves.

You are free to love your neighbors by being led by the Spirit: As adopted children of God, we are told that the Spirit of God leads us. In Romans 8:13-14, we read that it is “*by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body*” and it affirms that we “*are led by the Spirit of God.*” So as we wear this hat that indicates we are part of the family of God and the kingdom of God, it is fair to ask, “What does our gratitude for Christ’s love and our freedoms compel us to do?”¹²

This is where I invite you to embrace the dynamic nature of the Holy Spirit who lives in you through faith in Christ. We each have challenges and dilemmas we face at work. That is life in every “spoke” of the wheel. I can’t give you an illustration or an answer for your specific dilemma. But what I can offer is this. A prayer! Ask the Spirit of God

to compel you and prod you to see what love demands for your specific situation. And then ask for power to love in that situation. It may mean swallowing your pride. It may mean taking blame. It may mean taking risk. It may mean extending grace. But at the end of the day, if it leads you to love there is no regret because this is the work of God in this broken world.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” This is the life of no regrets! It is a life of love. Let us wear the hat well!

¹Tim Keller *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012) 206

²Ibid., 206

³Ibid., 219

⁴Robert Alexander *The Gospel Centered Life at Work* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2014) 81

⁵R. W. Lee *The Elements of Roman Law* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1946) 60

⁶William Barclay *Letter to the Romans* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1955)

⁷Bryan Ross “Grace History Lesson—No 149 www.gracelifebiblechurch.com Oct. 26, 2014

⁸Alexander, 83

⁹Jim Mullin “The Butcher, The Baker and the Bio-tech Maker” Oct 29, 2014
thegospelcoalition.org

¹⁰Lester DeKoster *Work: The Meaning of Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Christian’s Library Press, 2010)

¹¹Ibid

¹²Alexander, 85

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. We would like to receive feedback on how things are going. Your facilitator will distribute a form for you to fill out. Take time at the beginning of your meeting to fill it out. Your honest feedback will be appreciated.

After you finish filling out your evaluation form, spend some time sharing as a group. What have you appreciated the most about being together as a group?

2. As a group, reflect on the question we pondered throughout the sermon. "At the end of your life, will you wish you had plunged more of your time, passion and skills into work environments and work products that helped people to give and receive more love?"

How does this question add value to your work?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Romans 8:12-17 - Thinking back on the sermon, what are some of the things you learned about the way adoption was practiced in the Roman world? How does this help you understand what Paul is saying in this passage about our relationship with God?

How does it help you understand what it means to be "a son" or "a child" of God?

4. Read Galatians 5:13-15 - Make note that because of Jesus and our "adoptions as sons" we are free to love and serve. What is it about being "a son" that frees us up to love and serve others? Can you think of an example at work where you are being called to love and serve others? How could you draw on your "son-ship" to free you up to love and serve in this situation?

5. Read Galatians 5:16-26. Make note of the difference between the flesh and the Spirit. Where do you see "sings of the flesh" in your place of work? As you are led by the Spirit, how might "the fruit of the Spirit" shine through you in this situation?

6. Get in groups of 2 to 3 and briefly answer these four questions:
 - How would you describe your work?
 - How does your work reflect some aspect of God's work?
 - How does your work give you a unique view of the brokenness of this world?
 - How does your work enable you to love and serve others?

Taking It Home

7. How might your practice being led by the Spirit this week as you are called to freely love and serve others? Where do you need the Spirit to compel you to freely love?