

The Fruit of Faithfulness: Fleeing Temptations in the Workplace

Galatians 5:22; Genesis 39:7-9

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Perhaps you have heard or have even said it yourself about a Christian tradesman or Christian businessman: “He may profess to be a Christian, but his practice in business is hardly Christian. I would rather take my business to the unbeliever down the street, who has a reputation of dealing fairly with clients than take my business to the professing Christian who has a reputation of dealing unfairly with people.” What a travesty to the name of Christ when we Christians are dishonest, lack integrity, and are unfaithful to the Lord and to those we serve in business and at work.

When it comes to money, a profit margin, and sales, the testimony of a Christian will either shine forth in faithfulness to glorify Christ, or will reveal unfaithfulness in his love of money or in his love of power. It is not that money or power are sinful in themselves or that success in business is evil in itself (there were saints of old who were rich and powerful as well as successful in business—like Job, Abraham, David, Solomon etc.), but it is the case that **a love for these** (a first love for these) will lead a Christian away from the Lord, will bring him into perilous temptations, and will ensnare him in many compromises of God’s truth. The Lord has warned us through His prophets and apostles in Scripture about these very temptations in the world (a love for money—1 Timothy 6:9-10; a love for power—Mark 10:42-45).

Work is a calling upon all of our lives (whether that be out of the home, in the home, or in the classroom), God give us all work to perform because laziness and laying around doing nothing with our lives is a sinful waste of

our lives, even if we are unable to find fulltime work (Genesis 2:8,15; Proverbs 18:9). Whatever the work God has given to us to do at this point in our lives, we are to work for his glory and not for our own glory, because He is the one who gives us the power, the ability, and the wisdom to work and to be successful in our work (Deuteronomy 8:17-18; Colossians 3:23-24).

If there is any particular attribute that summarizes what should characterize the Christian in his/her work, it is the fruit of faithfulness, which involves integrity, honesty, love and loyalty to Christ above all, and service to one's fellow man. This fruit of faithfulness in the workplace was particularly exemplified by Joseph (the son of Jacob) in the text that is before us today. The main points of the sermon are these: (1) The Faithfulness of Joseph in the Workplace (Genesis 39:1-6); (2) The Faithfulness of Joseph When Faced with the Temptation to Compromise (Genesis 39:7-12); and (3) The Consequences of Joseph's Faithfulness (Genesis 39:13-23).

I. The Faithfulness of Joseph in the Workplace (Genesis 39:1-6).

A. As Genesis 39 begins, we find that Joseph has been sold into slavery by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver (Genesis 37). His brothers hated and despised him because he was so honored by Jacob their father and because he spoke the truth. So rather than receiving their brother into their company, they devised a plan to be rid of him forever (or so they thought). They sold Joseph to traveling merchants on their way to Egypt, and then took Joseph's gift of honor from his father (the coat of many colors) and mixed it with the blood of a slain animal so as to lie to and deceive their father, Jacob, that Joseph had been slain by a wild animal.

B. Joseph was likely not much older than 17 years (according to Genesis 37:2). What an ordeal for a teenage boy (not much older than some of you and not much younger than some of you). Here he was an honored son of Jacob (a wealthy man in that part of the world), stripped of his freedom, dignity, and father, and sold into slavery in a foreign country (Genesis 42:21). His world was turned upside down. All that was familiar to him was gone. And yet God did not abandon Joseph.

1. Yet in the midst of such suffering and anguish, the Lord was with Joseph. God had a plan. God was in control—not his brothers, not the slave traders, not Potiphar, and not even the Pharaoh of Egypt. Even though Joseph had no control over these events in his life, God overruled the evil of man to accomplish His eternal purpose in ultimately preserving a nation that would bring forth the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, dear ones, our only hope when we face hardships and persecution for being faithful to Christ. We cannot give up; we must be faithful unto death, for God is up to something good.

2. As we read these opening verses in Genesis 39, we are amazed to see the hand of the Lord in all of these events as Joseph is sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. As captain of Pharaoh's guard, Potiphar was a highly trusted official in the government of Egypt. He was likely the head of the palace guard, which would be equivalent to being the head of Pharaoh's personal security force (or "Secret Service").

C. We read that in spite of all that Joseph suffered, the LORD was with Joseph, and prospered him in his work ("he was prosperous" Genesis 39:2-3), even to the point that Potiphar made Joseph the chief steward of his entire estate (Genesis 39:4-6).

1. Dear ones, having the Lord with us is the epitome of the inheritance of all the saints. Fear flees when we know and believe that the Lord is with us. When the Apostle Paul would bless God's people in his inspired letters, what does he promise to us? God's presence with us

(2 Corinthians 13:14)! When the Lord Jesus would bless His people and give unto them and us the greatest blessing and comfort, what does He promise? His presence with us (Matthew 28:20)! And Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph. How? By Joseph's faithfulness, by his diligent work, by his honesty and integrity, by his humility, and by God's blessing over the work that he performed. Joseph showed Potiphar through his work that his God was the one true living God. Your bosses (and fellow workers) should likewise see the difference Jesus Christ makes in your lives by your faithfulness to the Lord and by the faithfulness and diligence in the work you perform.

2. It would have been easy for Joseph to simply write this job off as a waste of time, as a job that was going nowhere, and to wallow in self-pity, hating every moment of his work (since he was only a slave). But Joseph trusted the Lord that there was a purpose in his work, and God could bless him right where he was. He wasn't waiting for a better position to present itself, so that he might be faithful to the Lord and be blessed by the Lord. He looked for the blessing of God in the midst of his slavery (as he did in the midst of his imprisonment afterwards). Are you spending your time wishing that you had a different job and hating your present work, or are you rather being faithful right where you are and prospering right where you are because the Lord Jesus Christ is with you to use you and to bless you?

3. Joseph was successful/prosperous (first and foremost in the eyes of God) in his workplace, and the Lord graciously made him successful in the eyes of his master. This success did not likely happen overnight, but required years of faithful and diligent work in learning the language and customs of the Egyptians, and in demonstrating to Potiphar over months and years that because he was faithful in little he would also be faithful in much. Joseph was a young man of faithfulness in serving his master, not under favorable circumstances, but under the worst kind of circumstances, and the Lord blessed his faithful work and promoted him

to the highest place of service in his workplace (**Psalm 75:5-7**).

II. The Faithfulness of Joseph When Faced with the Temptation to Compromise (Genesis 39:7-12).

A. Sometime after he had ascended to that place of highest honor in the workplace of Potiphar's estate, there arose the temptation to compromise his faithfulness on the altar of lustful gratification. His master's wife sought to seduce Joseph, not once or twice, but "day by day" (Genesis 39:10).

1. Perhaps the greatest temptations to compromise in and around the work that we are presently called to do to the glory of Christ are the following: (1) the temptation to love money/wealth (1 Timothy 6:9-10); (2) the temptation to love power/prestige (Mark 10:42-45); (3) the temptation of lust/sexual gratification (2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:18); (4) the temptation to be discontent (Hebrews 13:5); and (5) the temptation to fear what man can do unto you—threats (Hebrews 13:6). We must be ever so vigilant and watchful, for the enemy of our soul has ensnared and entrapped many in the workplace by unfaithfulness to Christ, to one's family, to one's boss, and to one's co-workers by these temptations to compromise.

2. Joseph was careful to never be alone with his master's wife (Genesis 39:10). Certainly then it was his master's wife that set the trap when she knew no one would be in the house. This is why ministers ought not to be alone when counseling women. It is why you should not engage in meals after work with those of the opposite gender (unless it is a public business meeting (and if possible, try always to invite someone else to join you and travel in separate vehicles—to protect yourself against false accusations of impropriety and against weaknesses of the flesh).

B. Joseph called such a compromise at the workplace what it was: sin. He referred to this temptation set before him as a great wickedness and sin first and foremost against God. So often it seems, people want to call sin by other names. For example, anger is a “short fuse” or “he’s just having a bad day”. Rudeness is called “self-expression”. Pride is called “self-esteem”. Covetousness is just “trying to get ahead” or “trying to make a name for yourself”. Sodomy is simply “an alternative lifestyle”. Adultery is “a cry for help in a sad/bad marriage”.

1. David reflects this same heart in his prayer of repentance for his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 51:4). Of course, David had also sinned against Uriah, against Bathsheba, against their child, against his family, and against his people; but those were of far less consequence than his sin against God. True repentance must have that perspective at its core.

2. Perhaps many might have hardly blamed Joseph had he fallen into this temptation. Likely many would have blamed the sin upon the temptress, and excused Joseph for his immaturity and weakness of youth. However, Joseph saw so clearly that such a compromise would be a grave and serious sin against the God who had been with him in protecting him from his brother’s cruel plan to leave him to die in the pit, the God who had been with him in appointing him to the service of Potiphar in the midst of his slavery, and the God who had been with him in blessing him and prospering in that work. Charles Spurgeon has rightly noted how a true Christian views his/her own sin.

When I regarded God as a tyrant, I thought sin a trifle; but when I knew him to be my father, then I mourned that I could ever have kicked against him. When I thought that God was hard, I found it easy to sin; but when I found God so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, I smote upon my breast to think that I could ever have rebelled against one who loved me so, and sought my good (“Repentance and Conversion”, Sermon 2419).

C. Joseph did what in faithfulness to the Lord and to his master he was bound to do: he fled. He was in such a hurry to get away that he left his outer garment in her hands (“Flee youthful lusts” 2 Timothy 2:22;

“Flee fornication” 1 Corinthians 6:18). If we are not actually running away from the temptation to sin and to compromise our Christian testimony in our work, we will sooner or later fall into that sinful compromise. Many seem to think they can flirt and play with temptation and not be hurt by it, but as many of us can testify to those who are much younger, “When you play with fire, you will get burned.” You may not be running deliberately as fast as you can to that temptation, but lingering in its presence will ensnare you just the same.

III. The Consequences of Joseph’s Faithfulness (Genesis 39:13-23).

A. The first consequence was that Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph before Potiphar (Genesis 39:13-18). Joseph no doubt knew what his fleeing this temptation would cost him (especially with his garment left in her hands), but he considered being faithful unto God and unto his master in the workplace to be more important than the consequences he would suffer.

B. The second consequence was that Joseph was sent to prison for being faithful to the Lord and faithful to his master (Genesis 39:19-20).

1. The world would respond that this was a rotten deal that Joseph received from the Lord for his faithfulness, for his integrity, and for his honesty in his workplace. However, the world sees only with its natural eyes—the Christian sees with the eye of faith. This was all part of God’s plan to place Joseph in prison, so that he might hear and interpret the dreams of Pharaoh’s baker and butler, and eventually be called to interpret Pharaoh’s dream with his exaltation to the second in command in all of Egypt to preserve his family and the nation that would bring forth the Savior of the world—Jesus Christ. Joseph testifies to this very truth (Genesis 50:20).

2. Joseph was likely given a life sentence in prison. Though

this was an unjust penalty (for he was innocent of any wrong), yet the ordinary punishment for such a crime (i.e. attempted rape) by a slave upon a high official's wife would likely have been death. Why was Joseph given the lesser punishment? In God's providence, the Lord preserved his life for the great events to come, and though Potiphar's wrath was initially raised, perhaps his suspicions were also raised to such an extent about Joseph's actual role in this alleged crime that he could not put a righteous man to death.

3. Dear ones, certain consequences will likewise confront us for not yielding to temptations to compromise the gospel (which is exclusive, by faith alone in Christ alone), to compromise the commandments of God (against homosexuality, same sex "marriage", Sabbath-keeping, against idolatry and false religion, against birth control and abortion).

C. However, Joseph once again prospers, even in prison (Genesis 39:21-23). You cannot keep a good man down. Why? Because the Lord was with him to give him hope, to give him courage to persevere, to give him protection, to give him diligence, and to give him faithfulness. God receives all of the glory—God was with him.

1. This did not exactly look like a promotion for Joseph—from the honorable place he held in the home of his father, to slavery, to being falsely accused of a crime he did not commit, to being sentenced for life in an awful prison. And why? Because Joseph was faithful to his God and to his master. In the eyes of man, Joseph was being demoted, not promoted. But in the eyes and plan of God, Joseph was being promoted, not demoted; for Joseph was proving himself to be faithful to His God in these awful, trying circumstances in which he was called to work for the glory of God.

2. Because Joseph was faithful in his calling to the Lord and to those he served, the Lord was preparing him for his exaltation—first

humiliation, then exaltation (that is the way of Christ—to be first, we must be last—to lead we must serve). After having been humbled from age seventeen (when he was sold into slavery) to age thirty (when he appeared before Pharaoh), after having served a thirteen year apprenticeship to sorrow, to ups and downs, to humiliation, he came to stand before Pharaoh, and was exalted by the Lord, for God was with him through it all.

3. You see, the Lord measures success and prosperity not by earthly standards of wealth, power, and fame, but rather by faithfulness to Him in trusting Christ, in loving him as your first love, and in obeying him (even when you fall, you arise again with renewed faith, hope, and obedience).

a. Dear ones, though the Lord was with Joseph, that reality did not screen him from temptation of the worst kind. It did not quash his brother's hatred for him or keep them from selling him into slavery. It did not prevent his mistress from casting her wicked eyes upon him and falsely accusing him. It did not shelter him from suffering in prison for a crime he did not commit. Perhaps some of us would have said, "If the Lord is with me, how can these evil consequences be happening to me?"

b. Dear ones, everything may seem to go against you, and yet God will still be with you who trust Him, love Him, and serve Him in faithfulness. The Lord may not give you earthly prosperity for your faithfulness in the work place, but He will give you true prosperity in the fruit of the Spirit, in gracious affections, in forgiveness of sins, in reckoning to you the righteousness of Christ, in bearing you up on eagle's wings through every trial, and in receiving you into your heavenly home with great joy and everlasting life.

Dear ones, I invite you to look in faith not to that earthly Joseph who was rejected by his brethren, sold into slavery, and falsely charged with

crimes he never committed, but rather to look in faith to that greater Joseph, the Lord Jesus Christ who was falsely accused, suffered the wrath and condemnation of God for undeserving sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began. He was humiliated far more than Joseph, but He was exalted far more than Joseph. He is seated at God's right hand and is Lord over all the world for the good of His people. Just as the earthly Joseph received and blessed even his brothers who hated him, despised him, disbelieved him, and enslaved him, so the greater Joseph, the Lord Jesus Christ, will receive you, even if you are the chief of sinners, if you come unto him beating your chest and crying out to him, "Lord Jesus be merciful to me a sinner."

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