

“Wear it to Work” (Titus 2:9-10)

John was an excellent medical internist whose character was put on public display as he established his practice. While dealing with the normal professional stresses on a young doctor, John and his wife had their first child, a son born with spina bifida. John’s colleagues were well aware of the strain on him as he managed his workload while making frequent trips to Texas Children’s Hospital. John may have had reasons to be irritable, but he rarely was. One day during rounds, he discovered that a nurse had made a serious mistake that endangered a patient’s life. John reprimanded the nurse firmly but respectfully. She walked away with her self-respect intact—an unusual result when compared with similar encounters with unhappy doctors. John was unaware that a colleague had overheard his reprimand. Leaving the nursing station, John felt a hand on his shoulder, “John,” his colleague said, “I overheard how you handled that situation. If you were a preacher, I’d go to your church.”

The fact is John is a preacher. You are too. When people see your competence, character, and consideration, the things you say have a power equal to or greater than any sermon preached by me. There is a distance between pulpit and pew that does not exist in the workplace.¹ Whether you are aware of it or not, when you are working, people observe your life and overhear your conversations. As a supervisor, your employees and fellow supervisors are watching and listening to see how you treat those under your care. You are a preacher. Your job is to preach God’s Word through your work. As an employee, your boss and fellow employees are watching and listening to how you respond when your boss bawls you out. You are a preacher. Your job is to preach God’s Word through your work. As a stay-at-home mom, the other moms are watching how you interact with your children at the park. You are a preacher. Your job is to preach God’s Word through your work.

The book of Titus shows how this is possible. Titus was sent to the island of Crete to establish a church. Crete was a difficult place to minister. It had a reputation throughout the Roman world because the people had sunk to a deplorable moral level. They were lazy, irresponsible, and drunk. One of Crete’s poets described the people as “liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons” (1:12). Crete was not exactly an ideal place. So what strategy did Paul recommend to Titus for ministering in this hard place? He was to set up people of character as leaders in the church (1:5). Since Titus’ church on Crete was newly planted, the main concern of Paul was that the believers begin living an exemplary Christian life, so as to be an example of the grace of God to their pagan neighbors.² In chapter 2, Paul addresses five specific groups: senior adult men, senior adult women, younger women, younger men, and employees (2:1-10). We will focus on employees in particular. In Titus 2:9-10, we find five character qualities that should mark every Christian employee: submissive, pleasing, harmonious, honest, and faithful.

1. Submissive: In 2:9a, Paul writes, “**Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything.**” The word “**urge**” that is in italics means that there is no corresponding Greek word in this verse.³ However, the translators of the NASB rightly included this word because 2:9 links back to the command “urge” (*parakalei*) in 2:6. This word instructs us that we are responsible to live out these verses and also remind other believers to do the same. Paul urges bondslaves “**to be subject to their own masters.**” He doesn’t say that we should be obedient to every free man, only to “**their own masters.**” Paul recognized that bondslaves had obligations, but only to their own masters.

The word translated “**to be subject to**” comes from a background of military usage and refers to accepting orders under conditions of discipline and strict organization. It means to get into rank, to fall in, to get in line, to line up under. The verb “**subject**”⁴ is passive which means to line yourselves up under the authority that is over you. Get in line; don’t be out of line. [Approach one of the soldiers in the congregation and ask how he responds to his commanding officer.] In the same way, this is how we should respond “**in everything**” to our earthly master.

Paul is asking us to yield to our bosses in order to avoid any unnecessary interpersonal conflict or power struggle. A traffic sign with the word “Yield” on it comes to mind [Display a yield traffic sign.] Drivers who have a yield sign are to give right of way to the other driver. Have you ever been on a country road with a single lane bridge and two yield signs, one on either end? “Yielding” in that scenario is a reasonable and gracious way of preventing a head-on collision. When the Bible commands us to be subject to our earthly masters, it is simply a reasonable and gracious command to let the other have the right of way and avoid interpersonal head-on collisions.

How can we properly subject ourselves to our boss? What kind of attitude is your earthly and heavenly boss looking for? I would suggest the following:

- An attitude that shows up early or on time, ready to work.
- An attitude that leaves late or on time.
- A “what-can-I-do”? attitude. If there is down time they look to help in other ways.
- A “no-job-is-beneath-me” attitude. Whatever you ask me to do, I will do it.
- A “how-can-we-do-it-better”? attitude. Always trying to do things better/faster/quality.
- A “team-player” attitude. Always ready to help the next guy.
- A “grateful” attitude. I am glad to have this job.
- An “I-will-trust-the-Lord” attitude. Knowing the Lord will care for my family and me.

[Not only are we called to be submissive, we are also called to be...]

2. Pleasing: Employees are to be “well-pleasing.” Elsewhere the adjective translated “well-pleasing”⁵ is always used of man’s relation to God. You might work hard for the sake of your promotion, your income, the security of your job, or to please your boss. But what kind of work would you do if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself were your employer? Well, He is. That’s the point. He wants you to be “well-pleasing” to Him. He wants you to give Him complete satisfaction. As you do so, your earthly boss will be equally pleased.

Paul is saying that Christian employees are to perform with excellence rather than mediocrity. Excellence means being your best. Excellence means being better tomorrow than you were yesterday. Excellence means matching your practice with your potential. Do a good job at what you do. Don’t wait for someone else to establish the standard or set the pace. Strive for excellence and everyone will know who the very best worker in the entire office is.

Two men were discussing a new house that one of them was thinking of buying. One named the builder and then said to the other, “You don’t have to worry about buying one of his houses. He builds Christianity into every house he builds.” Proverbs 22:29 says, “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.”

Unfortunately, it is also possible for us to dishonor the doctrine of God on the job. By our mediocre work and poor attitudes at work, we actually cause people to “slander” God and the truth about God (1 Tim 6:1). Many people have been badly wounded by Christians who cheated them or have performed substandard labor. A physician who does inferior medicine becomes a poor witness both to his patients and to his colleagues. A builder who professes to be a Christian but doesn’t keep his promises; his work is below standard; he can’t be trusted—this man undermines the Christian witness in the community. The name of God is slandered. Those who have done business with this builder have been repelled from the doctrine he openly professes.

But I have great confidence in you that you will be well-pleasing both to the Lord and to your employer. An example of a well-pleasing employee is Jennifer Cooper, of *Lancome* cosmetics [Interview.]

[We are called to be submissive and pleasing, but we are also called to be...]

3. Peaceable: Employees are to be sure they are “**not argumentative.**”⁶ Frankly, this is a very common fault among employees. You don’t like what your boss tells you to do, so you don’t do it. You don’t like what your boss tells you to do, so you do it half-heartedly, so that it will fail and then they’ll agree with you that you shouldn’t have done it in the first place. It’s so easy to mouth off, talk back, argue, rebel, and oppose any requirement. Yet, you are to be compliant and characterized as a harmonious employee.

[Not only are we called to be peaceable, we are also called to be...]

4. Honest: Employees are to be sure they are “**not pilfering.**”⁷ The fact that slaves are urged not to steal suggests that they were particularly open to this temptation. People who own nothing are often tempted to steal and help themselves when no one is looking. Most employees are in a position to steal something: pencils, computer time, petty cash, and working time. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, employee dishonesty costs American businesses over \$50 billion annually. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that 75 percent of all employees steal at least once, and half of these steal again and again. The chamber also reports that one out of every three business failures are the direct result of employee theft.⁸

In a *Reader’s Digest* survey of 2,624 readers, the percentage of those who said they had:

1. Called in sick at work when not ill: 63%
2. Taken office supplies from their company for personal use: 63%
3. Taken anything valuable from their company for personal use: 16%
4. Misstated facts on a resume/job application: 18%
5. Shifted blame to a co-worker for something they did: 13%
6. Been undercharged/received too much change from cashier and not told them: 50%
7. Downloaded music from an Internet site without paying for it: 37%
8. “Cheated” on their tax return (not declared income or over-reported deductions): 17%
9. Switched price tags to get a lower price for something you wanted to buy: 12%
10. Lied to friends or family members about their appearance, to avoid hurting their feelings: 71%
11. Knowing they had little chance of getting caught, driven more than 20 m.p.h. over the speed limit or gone through a red light: 71%
12. Lied to their spouse about the cost of a recent purchase: 32%
13. Lied to their spouse or partner about their relationship with another person: 28%.⁹

Rationalizations like “They owe it to me!” “Well, I’ve earned it!” “They will not be missed” are inexcusable. Stealing can never be justified. A person who cannot be trusted with small matters must not be trusted for large ones (see Luke 12:48). If you don’t have your integrity, you have nothing.¹⁰

[As Christian employees, we have been called to be submissive, pleasing, peaceable, honest, and...]

5. Faithful: Employees are to be characterized by “**showing all good faith.**” The word “**showing**” (*endeiknumi*)¹¹ is a powerful word that means “to direct attention to or cause something to become known.”¹² We are to do this by “showing all good faith.” In this context, the word “**faith**” (*piston*) is better rendered “faithfulness” (i.e., trustworthiness, reliability and loyalty).¹³ I love the word loyalty but I rarely hear anybody use it. Athletes used to be loyal. It used to be that the team was the issue and not the individual. There was a time when there was loyalty to a company, loyalty to somebody that you worked for or alongside, loyalty to a spouse, and loyalty to a friend. I don’t think most people know what it means anymore. Everybody is out for himself or herself. Yet, loyalty impacts your employer and fellow employees. It causes you to stand out. It permits you to preach God’s Word through your work.

The purpose (“so that”) in manifesting these five character qualities is **“so that they [bondslaves] will adorn the doctrine¹⁴ of God our Savior¹⁵ in every respect.”¹⁶** [Have Jennifer Cooper come back up and perform a cosmetic make-over on me.] The word **“adorn”** (*kosmosin*) is a word basically that means order. It’s used of arranging something, putting something in proper order, symmetry, or beauty.¹⁷ Properly arranged and applied cosmetics are designed to highlight features that bring out the beautiful traits of someone. We derive our word “cosmetics” from this Greek word. Paul is not speaking of putting on a Christian face. He wants the slaves to be Christians through and through. It means to set the doctrine of God forth in its most attractive fashion in the way we live in ordinary life. Paul entrusts to slaves the ministry of making the Gospel appealing to their masters.¹⁸

It’s interesting that this is the only place in the letter to Titus in which Paul gives a strategy for evangelism. In one sense the Gospel doesn’t need adornment. At the same time, we can show the beauty of the Gospel by the way we live. We often think we need better words to adorn the Gospel. Better words are fine, but what we really need are better lives. And those better lives are often on display where we work. If you apply the cosmetics of these five character qualities, you will be a beautiful thing to behold. More importantly, you will preach God’s Word through your work and make Him look attractive.

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Notes

¹ See William Carr Peel and Walt Larimore, *Going Public with Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 70-71.

² Fee writes, “The dominant theme in Titus is good works (1:8, 16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14), that is, exemplary Christian behavior and that for the sake of outsiders (2:5, 7, 8, 10, 11; 3:1, 8).” See Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993 [1984]), 12.

³ Other translations include a supplementary word to make this point as well: “teach” (NIV), “tell” (NRSV), and “exhort” (NKJV).

⁴ The Greek verb (*hupotassesthai*) is in the middle voice (cf. Titus 3:1; Rom 13:5). For other Pauline uses of *hupotasso* see Rom 8:7, 20 [twice]; 10:3; 13:1, 5; 1 Cor 14:32, 34; 15:27 [three times]; 28 [three times]; 16:16; Eph 1:22; 5:21, 24; Phil 3:21; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5, 3:1; cf. Luke 2:51; 10:17, 20; Heb 2:5, 8 [three times]; 12:9; Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 2:13, 18; 3:1, 5, 22; 5:5

⁵ Gk. *euarestous*, see also Rom 12:1-2; 14:18; 2 Cor 5:9; Eph 5:10; Phil 4:18; Col 3:20; Heb 13:21.

⁶ Gk. *antilego* is translated “opposed” or “obstinate” in some of its other NT uses. It has the idea of speaking back, resisting, thwarting, rejecting, disobeying (see Luke 2:34; 20:27; 21:15; John 19:12; Acts 4:14; 13:45; 28:19, 22; Rom 10:21; Titus 1:9).

⁷ Gk. *nosphizo* means, “to put aside for oneself, keep back, of engagement in a type of skimming operation,” see BDAG Electronic Ed. The only other NT occurrence of this word comes in the Ananias and Saphira narrative (Acts 5:2-3).

⁸ Preaching Today Citation: Bob Mather, “[Employee theft: Prevention Beats Apprehension](#)”; submitted by Aaron Goerner, Utica, New York.

⁹ Preaching Today Citation: “How Honest Are You?” *Reader’s Digest* (January 2004); submitted by Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky.

¹⁰ Honesty and good character are two of the most important aspects of the Christian’s testimony. In any witnessing situation, these traits are necessary before any verbal testimony can be successful.

¹¹ In Ephesians 2:7, Paul writes, “so that in the ages to come He might show (*endeiknumai*) the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” The Lord intends for us to be a testimony to His grace, both now and in eternity.

¹² See BDAG Electronic Ed. This is a distinct Pauline term with the exception of Heb 6:10-11 (see Rom 2:15; 9:17, 22; 2 Cor 8:24; Eph 2:7; 1 Tim 1:16; 2 Tim 4:14; Tit 2:10; 3:2).

¹³ “The use of ‘faith’ (*pistin*) to mean faithfulness is a Pauline usage in the NT (see esp. Gal. 5:22).” See Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 191.

¹⁴ Gk. *didaskalia* means, “teaching or instruction” (see Rom 12:7; 15:4; Eph 4:14; Col 2:22; 1 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 3; 2 Tim 3:10, 16; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 7, 10; cf. Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7).

¹⁵ The phrase “God our Savior” is unique to Paul (see 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jude 1:25).

¹⁶ The Greek phrase *en pasin* (“in every respect”) stands emphatically at the end. This same phrase is used in Titus 2:9 but is translated “in everything.” Note as well the word *pas* in 2:10 “...but showing all good faith so.”

¹⁷ The word *kosmeo* (“adorn”) is also used of the arrangement of jewels in a manner that sets off their full beauty.

¹⁸ See R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 333.