

The Christian Work Ethic

Ephesians 6:5-9

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Let's begin reading Ephesians 6:5. I'll read and you follow with me. Paul says, "Servants," or slaves, "be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling," or respect and trembling, "in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; 6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; 7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free," that's a slave or a free man. Then, in verse 9, he says to the masters, "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him."

As we go through Ephesians on Wednesday night, we discovered how we walk in harmony in the home. Paul says, "...but be filled with the Spirit," and the result will be we'll have submissive wives, loving husbands, obedient children who submit to their parents, and parents who will not provoke their children to wrath but will bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You might say, for the last several sections of Ephesians, we've been dealing with harmony in the home. Tonight we move into harmony in the workplace, and we need to bring the Christian ethic all the way into the workplace.

It's interesting that Ephesians starts in the heavenlies, chapter 1, and ends in the home and in the workplace, chapter 6. The book of Ephesians is very, very practical, and the blessings that we have in Christ in the heavenlies are meant to be lived out in our daily lives as we walk in this world.

Paul is speaking to servants and masters and mentions them in verse 5. The word "servants" there, a better translation would actually be slaves, is a reference to the *doulos*, the bondslaves, but it's probably a mixture of both of slaves who voluntarily chose to serve their master and those who were also bought or purchased. I'll talk more about slavery in just a moment. We're going to give it the application of employees, verses 5-8, and employers, verse 9. As a general rule, you're either an employee or an employer. You might be self-employed and working for yourself, but either way the Christian work ethic is clearly taught in this passage.

In the time Paul was writing, there were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. One out of every three individuals in Rome were actually slaves. There were more slaves in Rome and in the Roman Empire than there were free men, so it was a common institution and part of the economy of that day. It was something that had been around since mankind. You go all the way back even to the book of Genesis and into Exodus where the people of Israel became slaves in Egypt and God had to deliver them from that slavery, that 430 years of bondage to Pharaoh and to Egypt. Slavery was a very commonplace thing, and in the early years of Christianity, Christianity was an illegal religion in the Roman Empire, yet its preaching and teaching and the work of the gospel and the Spirit changing lives from the inside out would

change the institution of slavery.

I believe that the abolition of slavery today was the result of the Christian influence in the world of understanding that all men are created equal by God. In England, William Wilberforce, and America, of course, Abraham Lincoln, and the issues that we have there and that history in America that is being distorted. It's interesting to realize that Christianity brought women up to her right place, brought children up to their right place, and eventually, even though the Bible doesn't overtly condemn slavery, it doesn't commend slavery either, so it worked from the inside out to change men's hearts, men's attitudes, and eventually the institution of slavery that was a part of the culture.

There were so many slaves, and if they would have just openly radically opposed slavery, it would have brought the church into conflict with the Roman government even more so than preaching the gospel, and a lot of slaves would have actually been out of employment or out of work but they would also have been given over to poverty in the worst way. God slowly, gradually changed the heart of man through the gospel, and slavery was eliminated. Sadly today, because of man's sinful heart, there is still slavery going on in different fashions in the world even today.

Paul's words to slaves and masters is the last of three examples of submission. Go back with me to Ephesians 5:21 where Paul says that we should be, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear," or reverence, "of God." I pointed out that that was a lead into marriage or the home and that it's not just the wife's submission to her husband or the children to their parents, but it's a submission of one another in the respect, or reverence or fear, of God. We had wives, we had children, and we had servants. The whole focus of the passage is on those who had to submit and also the balance of those who were over them and had to give them the love, the discipline, the training, and not provoke them to wrath, and the masters who had to give that which was just and equal unto their servants.

It's interesting that Jesus, as I said, elevated women (I would refer you to John 4 and John 8). He stopped and talked to the woman of Samaria at the well. No Jewish man in public would ever stop and talk to a woman, but Jesus did. She was a woman of Samaria of another race and another religion. Jesus also elevated children. He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." Jesus also elevates manual labor—He was a carpenter, and probably a good carpenter. Can you imagine going to Jesus to have Him build a cabinet for you or maybe, "Jesus, can You build me a pulpit?" I'm sure that Jesus had blisters on His hands.

In the Greco-Roman world, especially among the Greeks and even the Romans, manual labor was despised. Those who did manual labor were despised. It's the influence of Christianity again that elevated the place of manual labor and hard work. Here we have God coming from Heaven, He's the Son of God who comes as a servant or a slave, I remind you, and gave Himself for others to serve them. Jesus also was in submission to His parents for those thirty years before He went into public ministry; and, no doubt, He worked with His dad when He was

young, trained as a carpenter, and what an interesting thing that is that Jesus and Christianity elevates manual labor. It's so important.

Before I begin to unpack these verses, we won't be long tonight, just five verses and we're going to move through it quickly, I want to say just a little bit about the subject of slavery. There are those who say that Paul should have openly and clearly condemned slavery, but he did not and is sometimes attacked for that. Let me say a couple of things. First, Paul did not condemn slavery in this passage, but neither did he condone it. I hear people saying all the time, "Well, the Bible condones slavery." No it doesn't condone slavery. It doesn't promote it, it doesn't encourage it, it doesn't condone it. There's nothing in this passage that affirms slavery as a natural or valid or divinely mandated institution. I want you to think for just a moment. We've just had wives and husbands, this is what we call marriage, and Jesus said, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." He's quoting from the book of Genesis, from the very beginning, so that is a God-ordained, God-designed institution.

I just had the privilege of officiating a wedding for a pastor friend of mine last Saturday. I was asked to do a little message on weddings, and I brought up the Genesis passage that this is the leaving and the cleaving and the one flesh is the foundation for the marriage relationship. Marriage has that Old Testament endorsement and teaching and God-ordained institution, but slavery does not.

Then, we have children in the home who are obedient and submissive to their parents, and parents who are training, loving, and nurturing their children. You have marriage and the family and the home, which is a God-ordained institution.

Secondly, Paul's discussion of the duties of Christian slaves and the responsibilities of Christian masters transformed the institution of slavery, which is not a divine, God-given institution. By the way, lest I forget, many of the slaves that were in the Greco-Roman world were more highly educated and more cultured than even their masters. Some have a theory that Luke, who wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, was actually a slave and was actually freed by his master. He was a doctor or a physician. They were actually highly trained, highly educated, and, in many cases in the Greco-Roman world, loved; but there was also the cruel aspects that they were property, they could be sold, traded, and had no rights. Again, Christianity changed men's hearts to understand that we are created equal.

I think it's interesting that if you do believe in evolution and that we're the product of just random development over billions of years, then that certainly would be a foundation for not only racism but also for slavery, that we have superior races of that nature because we're all the product of evolution—we've evolved farther. If you believe that we're created in the image and likeness of God by God, that we're unique, and that God has created us all equal...by the way, all humanity goes back to two individuals—Adam and Eve. That may sound over-simplistic, but I believe it's true. All humanity goes back to two individuals, so we're all united in that sense of coming from that common stock of Adam and Eve.

I would make reference to the book of Philemon. Philemon was a master, a slave owner, and had a slave named Onesimus. Paul was writing to Philemon, that little postcard epistle of one short chapter, and was saying, "I know that Onesimus robbed and fled from you, but he's become a Christian." He met Paul in Rome, so Paul is sending him back to Philemon, whom Paul happened to know. He was one of Paul's converts. He said, "I know he's wronged you. If he has, I'll pay you back, and I want you to receive him," listen carefully, "as a brother—not as a slave but as a brother."

Think about when they gathered in their church at that time, they were masters and slaves. When they took communion, they were masters and slaves worshipping together. The Bible actually tells us that all the ground at the foot of the cross is level. In the church, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." It's interesting that it was this transformation, that came from viewing all persons made in God's image, that ultimately destroyed the institution of slavery.

We can't spend the whole night on this subject, and again, I know there are critics of the Bible that blast the Bible as teaching slavery, but I think that they are missing a very important point that slavery was eventually abolished by the Christian influence by the preaching of the gospel and by the understanding that we're created all in the image of God.

There are two sections we are going to look at tonight. The first is in verses 5-8, that is, simply God's Word to slaves. In our case, it would be employees. Let's go back to verse 5, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; 6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; 7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free."

I want to point out that the primary responsibility of the slave to his master is obedience. If you're taking notes, you can write them down. (I think these points will appear on the screen as well). Verse 5, "Servants," or slaves, "be obedient to them that are your masters." You have, "Wives, submit...unto your own husbands...Children, obey your parents...Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters." In 1 Peter 2:18, it says, "Servants, be subject to your masters." It's the same word Paul used to describe the responsibility of children to their parents in verse 1 when he said, "Children, obey your parents." It's the same word, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters," so that's the primary command that God gives to these servants—they are to be obedient to their masters. It's so important.

Now, the question must be asked: How should they obey? Grudgingly, angrily, stubbornly. Should they just revolt against their masters? No. Let's break it down. First, they should obey with respect. I'm going to give you four ways they need to obey from the text. Notice it says you do it, "...with fear and trembling," so "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh," that basically means earthly masters. You have a Master in Heaven, but he's talking about our masters on earth. Again, the application for us today isn't the slave and

master relationship but would be the employee and employer relationship. It's basically saying when you go to your job, your place of employment, be obedient to your employer and do what they tell you to do as long as it's not illegal, immoral, or violating biblical principles—you're there on the job and you're supposed to be obedient.

Notice they're earthly masters, "...them that are your masters according to the flesh," but there's that statement that I was pointing out in verse 1, "with fear and trembling." That means it's not a begrudging or servile respect, shaking in your boots or in this case your sandals lest you make a wrong move, but it's the same word used for the fear or reverence of God. Back in Ephesians 5:21, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God," that's the same kind of root word as the word "respect." It means to respect the authority that is placed over you. Again, we have the marriage relationship, the parent-child relationship, and where do people learn respect of authority? Where do they learn to respect those who have been placed over him? In the home.

One of the reasons why we have so much chaos, rebellion, and confusion in our culture today is because of the breakdown of the home. I hate to say this, but I'm always kind of "pulling out my spiritual hair", even though it looks like I have lots of hair, I'm pulling it out when I watch the news and see these politicians interviewed trying to heal all the ills of our society, but they've rejected God, rejected the Bible, rejected Christianity, rejected Christian morals and influences, our Supreme Court has messed up marriage, and all that's going on in our culture today. I'm thinking, How can you not see this? As goes the home, so goes society. The breakdown in the home directly relates to the increase in crime, the lack of respect, lack of respect of authority. The breakdown in all levels of culture goes back to the home because it's the foundation of society. Children learn to obey and respect their parents in the home, thus they learn as they pass into adulthood to respect their employers as they go to the job.

It's hard sometimes when they're not respectful and you say, "My boss is really a bummer, and he's harsh, he's hard, and makes me work a lot. I don't really care for my boss," but you still have to do this obedient respect as the Bible tells us to. Again, you're going to need Ephesians 5:18, just as husbands and wives do, we must "...be filled with the Spirit," amen? We must have the Spirit's filling to be able to be obediently, respectfully serving those who we are employed by.

Secondly, notice that they should obey sincerely. Look at verse 5 in that little phrase, "...in singleness of your heart," and catch the phrase, we'll look at it in just a second, "as unto Christ." They do it with respect, "fear and trembling," and they do it, "in singleness of your heart." My King James Bible has "singleness of heart." The NIV translates that, "...with sincerity of heart." It's an interesting word. It comes from two Latin words which literally means without wax, sincere. You find that referenced in the Bible to being sincere. It's the opposite of hypocrisy and duplicity. But why the concept of without wax? Well, in the ancient world they didn't have glass or plastics that we have, so it was more common to use pottery. They were also into sculptures, and they used clay and pots. Whenever a clay pot would crack or break, they would actually take the powder from the clay dust, mix it with wax, and make a compound to fill in the

cracks or the faults in their pottery. It would become kind of a putty they would use to fill in the flaws. What it means is that you have no flaws, that you are consistent, you're honest, you're sincere—you're without wax.

It also carried the idea of examining by sunlight. If you were buying a pot in a market, you would go out where it was sunny and bright and hold it up to the light to make sure it had no cracks, so your life needs to be able to be examined and have no duplicity or hypocrisy. It has to have sincerity. Christians on the job are not to be hypocritical, they're supposed to be sincere. They're not to have a divided heart—we would also use the idea of two-faced—but be devoted to their job as unto the Lord.

Thirdly, we are to do our job consistently. Notice verse 6, "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers." That phrase, "eyeservice, as menpleasers," is something you can relate to. It means you're not just working when your boss is watching. Remember back when you were in elementary school, and maybe I'm just dating myself or giving things away of what we used to do. I wasn't one of the rebels, but I used to freak out whenever the teacher would leave the room. Remember when the teacher would leave the room? Why are you laughing? Everyone would lose their minds and jump up and run around, climb up on their desk and throw spit wads and papers and freak out. Then, they would always get somebody to watch the door, "He's coming (she's coming) get back to your desk!" and people would freak out? I used to think, Gee! Today, they have cameras and they'd bust you, but back then, if the teacher left the room, everyone just freaked out.

Maybe you were in a gym class. I remember back then it was called junior high, today it's called middle school, but you go from sixth grade to seventh and have to have P.E. and run and do exercise. I'm not into running, by the way. I don't do jogging. Whenever I see somebody jogging, I think, Why? We have cars. Why would you do that? If I hear the word "exercise," I sit down until the thought goes away. Here I am, and we had to "run the mile." I had never run two feet, why should I "run the mile"? We used to run on the track, and if the coach would actually go into the gym or go somewhere, we'd duck into a bush and wait, look at the watch, and then run back out. Or, I'd hide in the bushes until the crowd came around and I'd jump in the front like I was winning the race, you know, and all the things you do.

I remember I had a job one time when the boss actually hid in the rafters and was spying on us. Everybody knew that he was watching so we're all working really good, you know. There's an old English proverb that says, "When the cat's away, the mice will play." That's what he's saying. You don't just work, "Oh! The boss is watching! Get to work, get to work!" You're consistent and conscientious You're doing it as unto the Lord. You're not doing it as unto men. You're not just being a man pleaser. It's so very important.

John Phillips in his commentary said, "The Christian employee is to be diligent. He's not to call in sick when he's healthy. He's not to waste his boss' time in idle conversation or conduct personal business when he should be working. He's not to drag his feet, paid break times, arrive late, leave early, or demand that two people do a job that he could do alone. Those are

the world's ways, not the Christian way." We're to be conscientiously working in obedience and consistently working as unto the Lord.

Notice in verse 6, you're "...doing the will of God," when you're doing it, "from the heart." Again, you're doing it as unto the Lord, you're in the will of God, and you're doing it from the heart. My fourth point on how we must obey on the job, slave to his master or employee to employer, is that we need to do it enthusiastically, verse 7, or wholeheartedly. In the King James translation it has "With good will doing service," here it is, "as to the Lord, and not to men." The idea is that we do it wholeheartedly. The New English Bible translates that cheerfully. Again, that's quite difficult to do—to go to your job and to do it cheerfully as unto the Lord.

When I was a young Christian, I had a lot of manual labor jobs. I worked for an organization called Man Power. It was a day labor thing. You'd go to the main office and calls would come in, "We need helpers or workers," and you'd get sent on all these really low-down dirty, horrible, rotten jobs that no one wanted. It was the only thing available when I did it, and I had some pretty nasty jobs. There was only one job that I did that one day and said, "I won't be back tomorrow." Just praying, "Lord, help me. Give me the right attitude. Let me do it as unto You. Let me not complain. Let me not gripe. Let me do what I'm told. Let me be a witness as unto You, Lord."

I want you to notice three times, in verse 5, "...as unto Christ;" verse 6, "...as the servants of Christ;" and verse 7, "...as to the Lord." Jesus makes the difference. Amen? He can turn drudgery into joy. He can turn a terrible, dirty rotten job into a blessing, if you do it as unto the Lord. You're doing it as you are doing it unto the Lord. It's like any job, you don't do it as unto man, it says in verse 7, but you're doing it as unto the Lord. If you're cleaning houses, it's the Lord's house. If you're cooking a meal, you're cooking it for Jesus. If you're an Uber driver, your passenger is Jesus and you're doing it unto Him. You're treating others with that respect, and you're doing it as unto the Lord. Again, how Christianity can change the work force and the employer-employee relationship and the whole attitude on the job because you're no longer serving men but doing it as unto the Lord.

This is a very, very important point to carry over in Christian service. Sometimes people want to serve at church, but they don't have a servant's heart and realize they're doing it as unto the Lord and not unto men. When the appreciation doesn't come, they don't get pats on the back, or people aren't really nice or they're rude or they don't get the recognition, they get upset, frustrated, quit, and they leave church. Most of the time it's because they weren't doing it as unto the Lord. The thing is, it's not the need in front of you, it's the call behind you, and it's the Lord beyond you. You're not doing it as unto people, you're doing it as unto the Lord.

Whenever, as a pastor, I start focusing on people too much, I start griping and complaining because people are fickle, people can be flaky—I just thought I would encourage you today—and you need to get your eyes off the people and get them on the Lord. It's the same thing in your marriage. It's the same thing with serving around the house, maybe in your domestic duties, "No one appreciates me," well, you're doing it to the Lord. We're going to see it's from

the Lord in verse 8 we get our reward. If your boss doesn't appreciate you, your husband doesn't appreciate you, your wife doesn't appreciate you, it's unto the Lord that you're doing it. If you can just get this attitude that, "I'm a servant of Christ," it doesn't matter if you're driving a truck or swinging a hammer. It doesn't matter if you work at a desk on a computer. Whatever your job might be—a plumber, an electrician, maybe a lawyer, maybe a used car salesman (we'll pray for you after the service; there is such a thing as a Christian used car salesman)—you're doing it as unto the Lord. You're selling this car to Jesus. You're fixing this plumbing leak for Jesus. You're driving your truck for the glory of God. You're doing it as unto Jesus. Everything we do, we do as unto Christ, as the servants of Christ, and as unto the Lord. Jesus is the One that makes the difference.

Now, why should we obey respectfully, sincerely, conscientiously, and enthusiastically? Here it is, verse 8, "Knowing that," we know something, "whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free," whether he be the slave or whether he be the master; whether he be the employee or the employer. If we've done these things that Paul describes, if we serve and obey with respect, and sincerely, conscientiously, enthusiastically, we do it as unto the Lord, then we will, verse 8, be blessed and rewarded by God. These are the steps that we take to be blessed by God, not only now in this world, but also when we die and go to Heaven, we'll hear those words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

That's not just for pastors or evangelists, that's for faithful mothers, faithful fathers, faithful truck drivers, faithful workers, construction workers, whoever you are, whatever God called you to do, you are God's servant. You're not working for that company, you're not working for man, you're working as unto the Lord; and from the Lord, verse 8, you will receive your reward. You keep that perspective, that it's not a payday at the end of the week, but it's at the end of your life when you're rewarded by the Lord.

Paul closes with one verse, verse 9, to the Christian masters, or we would say Christian employers. He says, "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them," that's an interesting statement. He's basically saying, "All that I just described for the servants toward the masters, now I want the masters to do toward the servant." Remember when he said, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands," he said, "Husbands, love your wives." Remember when he said, "Children, obey your parents," he said to parents, "...provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Remember, now he says, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters," and he says, "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them," your servants, give them what is just, right, and equal. This is why Christianity changed the world, certainly changed this evil, wicked institution of slavery.

So, the husbands and parents Paul describes as masters' corresponding duty as well. It's dealt with more briefly. You say, "Well, why is there only one verse for the master but four verses for the slave?" It's probably because the central theme and writing of the text is focused on the submission. It goes back to Ephesians 5:21, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." That's the focus. It's submission. He has a larger section for the slaves, and the

slaves were more common than the masters in the ancient world.

Paul says to the masters, or in our case employers, it is truly revolutionary. First of all, Paul states what we call the managerial golden rule in verse 9. This is the principle: Do the same thing unto them. In other words, if you want respect, show them respect. If you want sincerity, then be sincere. If you want them to be conscientious, then you should be the same. If you want them to be pleasant, then you should be pleasant. You can't mistreat your employees and expect them not to show the same to the customers that come into the store.

We all know that if we have been around for a while that customer service in our world today isn't what it used to be. I've gone into Lowe's to buy something and didn't know if anyone was even in the entire store for a whole hour. I find one guy hiding under a trash can somewhere, "Hey, can I buy something?" "Oh, yeah. I guess so." Remember when people used to pump gas for you, clean your windshield, and check your oil? Unbelievable. Just that thought today just blows our minds. Or people would say, "Can I help you?" and would answer questions. Today you have to go find somebody to help you and they're like disgusted that you bothered them. It's unbelievable. When you find somebody that's helpful and goes out of their way, you think, This guy must be born again. He must be a Christian. I can feel the vibe coming from them right now. Actually, when I go to Lowe's or Home Depot, everybody I run into it's, "Hi, Pastor John," "Hi, Pastor John." I think it's called Home Depot Revival Christian Fellowship. What a witness we can be to the world around us when we serve the way Paul described here in this passage. Again, this would apply to Christian service also in the church. So, do the same as unto them.

Secondly, we have the prohibition for the masters in verse 9. It says, "...forbearing threatening," so he must not threaten. He must practice the managerial golden rule, and he must not threaten. That's the prohibition, "forbearing threatening." The slaves could be beaten, tortured, put to death, and the masters could be cruel, so he's telling them not to do that.

Thirdly, verse 9, he must remember, and I love this closing point, that as a master that "your Master also is in heaven," just as the slave has a Master in Heaven who will one day judge him, that you're going to be answering to God. In verse 9, you have a principle, the principle is do the same as unto them; the prohibition, "...forbearing threatening;" and then an incentive, that you have a Master in Heaven and He will judge you. Notice in verse 9, "...forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master," it's referring to not only the slave owner or the employers, but it's referring to the slaves as well that He's both your Masters, "also is in heaven; neither is there," I love this, "respect of persons with him." When you get to Heaven, you can't say, "Well, I was the owner of the company," or "I was the slave owner. I was the master." That's not the way it's going to work. God is not going to take note of that.

Someone said, "The gold ring of the master does not attract his eye, and it is not averted from the iron fetters of the slave." I love that. Again, the ground is equal at the foot of the cross when we realize that we both have a Master in Heaven and that we're going to give an account to Him and be judged by Him. Remember Jesus said, "If you would be the greatest in this world,

become the servant of all.” In God’s Kingdom, the economy of God, the greatness is being humble and serving others for the glory of God. Amen? Let’s pray.