

## A Spirit-Filled Workplace

Ephesians 6:5-9

- 5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;**  
**6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,**  
**7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,**  
**8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.**  
**9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also[b] is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.**

In Walt Disney's fairy tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the little men march off to work each morning singing, "**Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go.**" What a job. They had a diamond mine in which there were golf-ball sized gems already cut faceted laying all around the mine! Instead of a diamond mine, most of us trudge off to a less than satisfying job each day. Instead of singing, "**Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go,**" we have bumper stickers on our cars that say, "**I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.**"

Most of us spend somewhere between one third to one half our lives on the job. We devote the major amounts of our time, talent and energy to our jobs. Our occupations are often major sources of stress, frustration, fear and health problems. Aren't you glad God included some practical teaching about work and workers in His Word?

The apostle Paul wrote our text to show how Christian workers and bosses should treat each other. Granted, it is addressed to slaves and masters, not to employees and employers. "So how does it relate to us?" That's a good question. Let's take a moment to examine the role of slavery in NT times.

In the first century Roman Empire there were some 60 million slaves. Over one third of the population of the empire were slaves. A person could become a slave by birth, in order to pay a debt, or by being captured in war. Some slaves were well educated and highly cultured. Some were doctors, lawyers, teachers and musicians. However most were ordinary menial laborers. These were looked upon as human tools.

Some are troubled because the Bible does not expressly forbid slavery. This is mainly because the Word of God is not a book of political reform but personal transformation. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, did something else: he addressed both slaves and masters directly and showed how their faith should radically change the way that they related to one another. As Charles Hodge observes (Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians [Eerdmans, p. 370]), as both sides treated one another in this Christian manner, "first the evils of slavery, and then slavery itself, would pass away as naturally and as healthfully as children cease to be minors." When people come to Christ, accept His teachings, and begin to live that way in their relationships, society begins to change.

Christianity eventually did kill slavery. As the message of Jesus' love and grace spread round the world, slavery began to die out. The European slave trade to the Americas was brought down by men of great Christian ideals, William

Wilberforce and William Pitt. The enslavement of a whole race of people simply because of their skin color is evil and a black mark in the history of our country and of Southern Baptists. Praise God for brave Christians who would not rest until that evil was ended.

Roman slavery of the first century was for the most part more humane and civilized than the enslavement of Africans early in our nation's history. In NT times, you were either a slave or a "freeman." There were many slaves in the early church and even some slave owners. It is no wonder that Paul, a freeman often introduced himself as slave or "**bondservant of Christ.**"

There are many similarities between the relationships of servants and masters in the 1st century and employers and employees in the 20th century. As believers, we are all "**bondservants**" to Jesus. So although our text was written to slaves and masters, it applies directly to employees and employers. It shows practically how those filled with the Holy Spirit, who subject themselves to one another in the fear of Christ (5:18, 21), should relate to one another in the workplace.

**Your relationship to Christ and the fact that you live primarily for heaven should transform your relationships at work.**

Many of you need this message. Often I hear about how difficult it is to find a good job. On the other hand I hear from employers how difficult it is to find good employees! As we examine this passage, ask yourself two questions. First, *how would I work if Jesus were my boss?* Second, *how would I "boss" if Jesus worked for me?*

## **I. The Characteristics of Spirit-Filled Employees (vv. 5-8).**

### **A. Believers are to be RESPECTFUL Workers (v. 5a).**

We are to "**be obedient**" to those who are over us "**with fear and trembling.**" This does not mean groveling at the feet of your boss, kissing up to him for fear that one wrong move will cost you your job. Rather, it suggests Christian reverence and respect for his position and authority... biblical submission.

You may be thinking, "**But pastor, you don't know my boss! If he were respectable I could respect him.**" I understand. I've been there. Still, the Scripture doesn't say, "**respect him if he is respectable,**" it teaches us to respect him regardless. In the 1st century, most Christian "**bondservants**" here had non-Christian masters. In the same way, many of you have non-Christian employers.

Note specifically in v. 5 that they are "**your masters according to the flesh.**" Spiritually, emotionally, intellectually your employer has no authority over you. Remember Jesus' words, "**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's**" (Mk.12:17)? In the same sense, respect your boss and "**render**" to him or her what you owe... a good day's work.

1 Tim.6:1 says, "**Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.**"

If you are blessed to serve under a believer, honor him all the more. 1 Tim.6:2 says, "**And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved.**"

There is no place in the Christian life for insubordination and cleverly concealed contempt for an employer. *It is a sin for a Christian to have a bad attitude at work.* We are to serve respectfully and at all cost avoid being known as complainers, whiners and shirkers.

There are times when a Christian employee must refuse to obey an employer. If he asks you to lie for him or juggle the books or take advantage of a customer, you must tactfully refuse. But hopefully these situations will be rare. Your normal mode of operation should be to obey your boss.

### **B. Believers are to be SINCERE Workers (v. 5b).**

At the end of v. 5, Paul says we are to work "**in sincerity of heart, as to Christ.**" "**Sincerity**" comes from a Greek word that has the meaning "without dissimulation or self-seeking." It carries the idea serving without hypocrisy.

This word for *sincerity* is often used in the New Testament to refer to generosity in Christian giving (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13). It has the nuance of singleness of focus, along with liberality. It means that you give it your all, with undivided attention and effort. You don't waste time on the job. You don't share your faith with other employees on company time, unless your boss has given you permission to do so. Rather, you are focused on the task that you have been assigned.

1 Thess.4:11 tells us to "**aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands.**"

So, believers are to give their employers sincere and honest service. This means we are not to appear respectful on the surface ("**Yes Sir, I'll get right on it!**") and then curse our employers under our breath. We are to display "**sincerity of heart.**" Why? Because when we serve our employers we are really serving Christ. We are to do our work "**as to Christ.**"

How can we work "**as to Christ?**" If you are a cook, cook like Jesus will eat it. If you clean, clean like Jesus will stay there. If you administrate, treat it like it is Jesus' business. If you sell, sell like you are selling to Jesus. If you serve customers, serve them as you would serve Jesus. Col.3:23 says, "**And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.**"

### **C. Believers are to be FAITHFUL Workers (v. 6).**

Note v. 6. We are to serve with "**sincerity... not with eyeservice as men-pleasers.**" How many of you have worked with people who only work when the boss is looking?

I read the other day of about an Englishman who was supervising a construction crew on a bridge project in South America. He had a terrible time keeping the natives on the job, for as long as he was watching, they worked, but the moment he turned away, they stopped working. Time after time, he would return to the job site to find the workers sitting in the shade. This particular foreman had a glass eye. One day he pulled the eye out and left it on a stump to "watch" the workers. This kept them at work for several days. However, when he returned again he found them the shade. Someone had crept up behind the eye very carefully, and placed his hat over it! The moral of that story is that *it is a sin for a Christian to be the kind of worker that causes his boss to pull his eye out!* The Lord is always watching.

We are to serve with "**sincerity... not with eyeservice**" and certainly not as "**men-pleasers**." A man-pleaser worries about what people think, but he's not concerned with what God thinks. He tries to make a good impression, so that he can get a raise or promotion, but his heart is not in the work. He is manipulative for his own gain, but not sincerely concerned about pleasing his boss as a testimony for Christ.

Remember *The Parable of the Talents* in Mat.25? The man who received 5 talents worked hard while the master was away. Likewise the man with 2. However, the servant with 1 talent wasted his opportunity. When the master returned he called him a "**wicked and lazy servant**."

Even if you have a "dead-end job" do it "**heartily as to the Lord**." A long time ago a wise man said to me, "*Do what you should do where you are to the best of your ability and the Lord will place you where you should be tomorrow.*" This is the Biblical principle of stewardship. What we reap is what we sow. What we put into life is what we get out of life.

Whatever the job, Christians should stand out. Employers should recognize them not only for their honesty and integrity, but for the effort they put in... hard work.

Note the end of the verse. We are to work "**as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart**." Some employees work "half-heartedly." A believer should always put his heart into his work, do the job well. Why? Because he ultimately works for Jesus. His work also reflects Jesus.

You might be thinking, "**Pastor, this is easy for you. You work for the Lord**." So do you. You represent the Lord every day just as much as any full-time Christian worker. You are a minister in your marketplace. Act like one! Work like one!

#### **D. Believers are to be PLEASANT Workers (vv. 7-8).**

Note the phrase "**with good will doing service**" in v. 7. this could literally be translated "with kindness or pleasantness." The *NEB* translates, "**Give the cheerful service of those who serve the Lord, not men**." We might understand it as "service with a smile." This implies having an enthusiastic, positive, cheerful spirit on the job. It's easy to fall in with other employees that complain about the boss or the low pay or the poor working conditions or the lousy benefits.

Remember, the slaves to whom Paul was writing didn't have any rights, any benefits, any time off, or any pay beyond board and room! If they goofed up, they could be beaten or worse! If they did well, there were no raises or promotions. And yet Paul tells them to be obedient in the sincerity of their hearts, doing the will of God from the soul, and rendering service with good will, which has the nuance of zeal, eagerness, and wholeheartedness (O'Brien, p. 452). Why? Because they were doing it for the Lord Jesus Christ, not for their earthly masters. Christians should be the best employees on the job!

Let's make this practical, let's get down to the nitty-gritty. If we just do enough to get by, if we have to be poked and prodded to do the job, if we show up for work grouchy and irritable, if we are moody and undependable, if we exhibit a "poor, poor pitiful me" mentality THEN WE ARE VIOLATING SCRIPTURE AND SINNING!

Further, we are robbing ourselves of blessings. Remember the law of sowing and reaping? Look at v. 8, "**knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is slave or free.**" Maybe you didn't get that raise. Maybe you didn't get the promotion. Maybe your boss is mean-spirited and unfair. You are not responsible for your boss. You are responsible only for you. When you work pleasantly, you will "**receive from the Lord.**"

## **II. The Characteristics of Spirit-Filled Employers (v. 9).**

### **A. Believing Employers are to be Fair in their Actions (v. 9a).**

At first it seems as if this is a bit one-sided. Paul devoted four verses to th workers and only one verse to masters. However there is a reason for that.

Paul says, "**And you, masters [employers] do the same things to them [your slaves or employees].**" What "**same things**?" The "**same things**" employees are to give to their employer: respect, sincerity, faithfulness and pleasantness.

Employers are to treat their employees in exactly the same way. Paul is telling "**masters**" to review what he has said to "**bondservants**" and to apply these "**same things**" in their lives as well. A Christian employer should treat his employees as he would wish to be treated.

We might loosely paraphrase this phrase this way, "**Employers, did you read what I said to employees? You did? Good. Here's my word to you: DITTO!**" Col.4:1 says it this way, "**Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.**"

Employers get this now: Not only are you to be *respectful, sincere, faithful* and *pleasant*, you have the responsibility to MODEL THESE QUALITIES for all your employees!

You are not better than your employees. You are where you are because God has given you that place of authority. Jesus said in Luke 12:48, "**For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required.**" If you want gracious employees you must yourself be a gracious employer. Clarence Francis, who was chairman of the board of General Foods, said: "**You can buy a man's time; you can even buy a man's physical presence at a given place; you can even buy a measured number of skilled muscular motions per hour or day. But you cannot buy enthusiasm; you cannot buy initiative; you cannot buy loyalty; you cannot buy devotion of hearts, minds and souls. You have to earn these things.**"

### **B. Believing Employers are to be Fair in their ATTITUDES (v. 9b).**

Paul adds that employers are to "**give[ing] up threatening.**" Though "**threatening**" might have had a different meaning for slaves and masters, it really speaks to our attitude toward our employees. Employers don't use your God-given authority to bully and intimidate your employees. Be fair, honest and above all kind to all of them.

Why? First, Because "**knowing that your own Master also is in heaven.**" God is watching. V. 8 says "**Whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether slave OR FREE [master or servant].**"

Second, because **"there is no partiality with Him."** In God's eyes employers and employees are the same. On earth there may be different classes, but not so in heaven.

Paul repeats a phrase twice (6:8, 9) that reveals something that he had taught these believers: "knowing that..." The slave asks, "Why should I toil day after day in a difficult job that has no financial rewards for me?" Paul says (6:8), **"knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free."** The master asks, "Why should I treat my slaves decently and not threaten these no good, lazy bums when they don't work hard?" Paul answers (6:9), **"knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."** Both verses point to eternity. Because of their relationship with Christ, both slave and master should have their focus on laying up rewards in heaven, not on rewards in this life.

There is a story about an old missionary couple who had spent their lives working in Africa. They were returning to New York City to retire. They had no pension, their health was broken, and they were discouraged and afraid. When they went down to the wharf to board the ship, they discovered that they were booked on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from a big game hunt.

When they boarded the ship, no one paid any attention to them. Then they watched the fanfare as the President arrived, with the band playing and people waiving and straining for a glimpse of the great man.

As the ship moved across the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "Dear, something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these years, and yet no one cares about us? Here this man comes back from a big game hunt, and everybody makes much over him." His wife replied, "Dear, you shouldn't feel that way. Try not to be bitter about it." But he said, "I just can't help it. It doesn't seem right."

As the boat neared America, he became more depressed. When the ship docked, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor of New York plus a bunch of national leaders were there. The papers carried the story on the front page. But no one noticed the missionaries, as they slipped off the boat and went to find a cheap flat and to look for work.

That night the man's spirit broke. He felt that God had abandoned them. It just wasn't fair. "We don't have anyone to help us and no where to go," he told his wife. "Why doesn't God meet our need?" His wife replied, "Why don't you go into the bedroom and talk to the Lord about the whole thing?"

A short time later he came out of the bedroom, but now his face was happy. His wife asked what happened. He said, "I told the Lord the whole thing. I told Him that it's not fair. I told Him how I was bitter because the President received this tremendous home-coming, when no one met us when we returned home. And you know, as I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and said simply, "But, you're not home yet."

(There are several versions of this story. This one is from Ray Stedman, *Jesus Teaches on Prayer* [Word], pp. 30-31.)