

Ephesians 6:5-9
Working for the Man!

Scripture reading:

Ephesians 6:5–9 (ESV) — **5** Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, **6** not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, **7** rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, **8** knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. **9** Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Prayer for illumination:

Sermon introduction:

How many of you have gone through a country musci phase? I went through a country music phase several years ago (don't judge me).

Two songs on a similar theme come to mind...

The first song by Dolly Parton is called "9 to 5." In this song she dreams about a better life, a life without the drudgery of work, but for now all she can do is lament the ongoing hardship of the day in and day out toil of work. It is 9 to 5 today, 9 to 5 tomorrow, 9 to 5 the rest of her life. In the meantime, she proclaims that she is "barely getting by."

Then there is the song "Good Time" by Alan Jackson. You can hear the pain in Jackson's voice as he ekes out the lyrics, "work, work, all week long." Of course, the only bright spot in his entire life is the weekend. On the weekend he is free of the work, free of the boss, free of the time clock, free of the blood, sweat, and tears. On the weekend he can finally have a "g-o-o-d t-i-m-e."

We live in a broken world. East of Eden thorns and thistles cut our hands as we work. Work is hard! I think if we are honest, we would all probably admit that we grumble and complain about work.

How should we think about work? How should we think about the worker? This brings us to Ephesians 6:5-9. To answer these questions, we are going to look at three aspects of work from our text.

The workers plight

The workers work

The workers boss

First, the worker's plight

Let me ask a few questions about the worker's plight...

What caused the worker's plight? Slavery!

Ephesians 6:5 (ESV) — **5** Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,

As much as I appreciate Dolly Parton and Alan Jackson, they should not be complaining. Why? They are not bondservants. Most first century workers were bondservants. The word “bondservant” comes from the Greek word “doulos,” which is often translated as “slave.”

Historians estimate that there were roughly 5-6 million slaves in the Roman Empire during the time of Christ. This meant that roughly 30-50% of the population was a slave, implying that roughly 1/3 to half of the Ephesians saints were slaves.

The ESV translators chose the word bondservant in 6:1 to distinguish first century slavery from southern antebellum slavery. Why? There are some important differences.

Unlike antebellum slavery, slavery in Rome was not based on ethnicity.

Most slaves lived with their masters and were treated well.

Over 50% of the slaves in the Roman empire purchased their freedom before the age of 30.

Many slaves were wealthy and owned their own property, some even had their own slaves.

Slaves served as doctors, manual laborer’s, accountants, teachers, and cooks.

Most slaves did not have a moral problem with slavery.

By the time that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians so many slave owners were freeing so many slaves that Augustus Caesar introduced legal restrictions to curb the trend.

With all this said, eventually slavery was formally abolished in the Roman empire.

This brings us to the next question...

What caused the workers plight? Slavery!

What ended the workers plight? Christianity!

The vast majority of civilizations throughout world history embraced slavery. It was common in Greece, Rome, Egypt, Scandinavia, Africa, Asia, Arab cultures, and Native American cultures. Tragically, certain forms of slavery are still practiced in many cultures today. (Jesus Skeptic, 132)

This forces us to ask the question—if slavery was normal in world history, why was it abolished? More specifically where was slavery abolished? Author John S. Dickerson argues in his book *Jesus Skeptic*, that slavery has only been abolished in nations influenced by Christianity.

Consider the names of these famous abolitionists-

William Wilberforce

Frederick Douglass

Elijah Parish Lovejoy

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Harriet Tubman

Sojourner Truth

What do they all have in common? They were all committed Christians.

After a well-researched study of slavery, John Dickerson writes,

“If you remove these sincere Christ followers from world history, you get a very different world than the one we were born into. Not just a few of the influential abolitionists were Christians; no, every single influential abolitionist I studied was a Christian.” (Jesus Skeptic, 156)

It is really hard to find Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Atheist abolitionists. Why? Christianity, and Christianity alone, provides the theological and philosophical foundations for the abolition of slavery.

Application:

Have you ever wondered, why anyone should believe in Christianity? We should believe it because it is true.

Why else? Christianity is really good for humanity. Christ followers invented universities, hospitals, the scientific revolution, they liberated woman, and they abolished slavery.

Christianity has unquestionably been the greatest force of good in world history!!! This is an undisputed fact!!! (Jesus Skeptic, What is so great about Christianity, and the Triumph of Christianity by Stark)

Let me ask one more question under this first heading...

If Christianity is anti-slavery, why did Paul condone it?

For the record, Paul never condones slavery. On the contrary, Paul's teaching is what eventually brought an end to slavery...

In **Philemon 16**, Paul tells a slave owner to no longer treat his slave as a slave but to treat him as a beloved brother in Christ.

In **Gal. 3:28**, Paul teaches us that Christians are neither slave nor free in Christ, since we are all one in Christ.

In **1 Cor. 11:7**, Paul teaches that all human beings are made in God's image. If we are all made in God's image, how can we defend the notion of enslaving each other?

Why doesn't Paul specifically address the evils of slavery in Ephesians 6:5-9???

Because Paul's passion was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul knew that when he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, the slavery problem would eventually go away. Which is exactly what happened.

But in the meantime, Paul tells Christian workers to work hard for their masters, which brings us to the second point.

First, the workers plight

Second, the workers work

There are key differences between first century bondservants and twenty first century employees. Yet, the principals of this passage apply to anyone working for someone else.

With that in mind, how should we work?

We must work theocentrically!

Ephesians 6:5 (ESV) — 5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,

Theocentrically means godcenteredly!!!

Verses 5-8 describe how we must work. Jesus Christ is mentioned four times in verses 5-8, once in every verse. In other words, Paul is making it very clear, that we must think about every aspect of our work in relation to Jesus Christ.

Said another way, the god centered (more specifically Christ centered) nature of work is the hermeneutical key to these four verses describing the workers responsibility.

Verse 5 says that we must respect our bosses as we respect Christ.

Verse 6 says that we must work for our bosses as slaves of Christ.

Verse 7 says that we must work not for man but for Christ.

Verse 8 says that we must work hard to be rewarded by Christ.

Summary... we must come to grips with the fact that as Christians we are actually serving Christ when we serve our boss. Therefore, we must obey and respect our bosses.

Illustration:

A parable tells the story of three workmen building a glorious cathedral. A passerby saw them all working away and decided to stop and ask them a question. The passerby asked each one of them what they were doing?

The first sat on the ground surrounded by rocks, with a hammer in his hand. He answered, "I am chipping these stones."

The second was hammering some nails into a board. He answered, "I am earning wages."

The third was digging a hole with a shovel. He answered, "I am building a great cathedral."

This third response understood Eph. 6:5-8! The third person knew that he was building a church for the glory of God. (Hughes)

No matter what you are doing it must be done for the glory of King Jesus.

Application:

The housewife must cook a meal as if Jesus Christ were going to eat it.

The housewife must clean the mantle as if Jesus Christ were going to inspect it.

Teachers must educate children as if they were educating the Christ child.

Doctors must treat patients as if they were treating Christ.

Carpenters must build houses as if they were building Christ's house.

Window washers must wash windows as if they were cleaning Christ's windows.

CPA's must do taxes for their clients as if they were doing taxes for Jesus.

Software developers must develop software as if it was going to be used by Jesus.

You get the idea!!!

Furthermore, if we are working for Christ, we must work with excellence. God does all things with excellence, therefore we, the disciples of Christ, must strive to do all things with excellence, whether we are sweeping the garage floor, writing an English paper, or painting someone's house.

Christians should be the very best at their craft!!! Since they are working for King Jesus.

What Paul is saying implies that Christianity knows nothing of the sacred/secular split. No matter what God has called us to, we must perform it as an act of worship for the glory of Christ.

We must work theocentrically! In addition....

We must work diligently!

Ephesians 6:6–7 (ESV) — 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

Paul tells us that we must not never stop working when the boss is not watching. Rather, we must work diligently all the time because we are working for God.

The last few months that I worked for State Farm insurance, our office moved to a 4-10 schedule. This meant that many of us stayed in the office until 6pm, rather than 5pm. Yet, the boss left every day at 5pm. You will never guess what happened at 5:15, when the boss left... I know this is hard to believe, but most of the employees stopped working their claim files. Instead, they surfed the web, talked by the water cooler, or lolly gaged with their friends. What would you have done in this environment?

When I worked for the coffee stand as a 16-year-old I....

God calls us to work diligently!

Illustration:

William Carey went to India in the 1790s. His goal was to promote the welfare of the Indian people. What was the fruit of his diligence? Consider these staggering accomplishments-

Carey established the first banking system in India, and he taught up to date methods of agriculture and forestry.

He fought to end child sacrifices and the practice of burning widows alive with their dead husbands.

He fought for medical treatment for lepers.

He abolished the caste system among converts to Christianity.

He mastered several Indian languages and translated classical Indian literature into English for the first time.

He became a professor of Bengali, Sanskrit, and Marathi at Forth William College in Calcutta.

He also taught astronomy to move India beyond the fatalism of astrology.

He brought the first printing press to India and developed typefaces for Indian languages.

He established the first newspaper in Asia, and the first lending libraries in India, using books imported from England.

He helped found the first college in Asia, enabling all Indians, regardless of their Caste to receive an education.

With his companions, Cary reduced the hundreds of dialects in India down to 73 written languages, complete with grammars and dictionaries.

As a result, Indian philosopher Vishal Mangalwadi considers Carey the father of modern India.

In the midst of all of this, his wife had a mental breakdown and his print shop burned to the ground, causing him to loss decades of work.

He was forced start many of his translation projects over from scratch.

By the time he died in 1834, at the age of 72, he had supervised the translation of the Bible into 44 different Indian languages.

William Carey was incredibly diligent. Here is what I want us to see. He did all this work, without anyone watching him. Why? He was working for King Jesus.

Application:

Christians are called to be diligent, even when no one is watching.

Would others describe you as diligent?

What do you do when the boss, the teacher, the coach, or the parent is not around?

Kids, your teacher is your boss... are you working hard when the teacher turns her back? Do you work hard on your homework, when your parents are not watching?

We must work theocentrically!

We must work diligently! In addition....

We must work cheerfully!

Ephesians 6:7–8 (ESV) — 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

The phrase “good will” is often translated with the word “cheerfully.” Which means that we are called to work cheerfully.

I’m sure we have all worked with someone who grumbles about everything (the pay, the boss, the hours, the benefits, the work, the coworkers, the lighting, the computers, etc...).

Christians must work cheerfully, because they have much to be thankful for. Plus, they are working ultimately for the Lord and not man.

And by the way... cheerfulness and kindness often get noticed by the boss.

Furthermore, when we work cheerfully God promises to reward us in heaven. Yes, heavenly reward is a biblical motive for godliness. It is not the only motive, or even the primary motive, but it is a valid motive. When you work cheerfully, God will reward you on the final day.

How should Christian’s work?

We must work theocentrically!

We must work diligently!

We must work cheerfully!

How many of you work this way all the time? I hope no honest person raises their hand!!! We all fail to work according to God’s standard.

But there is good news, we often forget that Jesus had a “secular vocation” until he was 30 years old. He was a carpenter.

He always worked theocentrically.

He always worked diligently.

He always worked cheerfully.

How is this good news??? Christ is not only our example, but he is also our savior. Explain....

Yet this does not mean that we can slack off, knowing we are forgiven. His love must motivate our obedience.

We have talked about the worker's plight, and the worker's work, but what about the worker's boss? This brings us to the last point...

First, the worker's plight
Second, the worker's work

Third, the worker's boss

How should the boss behave?

Bosses must embrace the golden rule!

Ephesians 6:9 (ESV) — 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Paul says, "masters (i.e., bosses) do the same to them." In other words, if you want them to respect you, you must respect them. If you want them to work diligently for you, work diligently for them. If you want them to be cheerful around you, you must be cheerful around them. If you want your employee to do their best for you, you need to do the best for your employee.

Bottom line—if you want them to promote your welfare, then you must promote their welfare.

Illustration:

Several years ago, I read a fantastic book called "In search of God and Guinness." It is the true story of the Guinness beer family. This family started the Guinness beer company in the 18th century to create a healthier and safer alternative to hard liquor. They were distressed by all the drunkenness that resulted from the sales of hard liquor.

They made really good beer, with lower alcohol content, to keep people sober. God blessed this company. As the company grew, they added more and more employees. Here is what I want us to see—the Guinness beer company was a pioneer in employee benefits. They paid the employees the best wages, gave them the best benefits, and provided all kinds of goods and services to the employee's families. This was before any other company even considered the welfare of their employees.

Why did the Guinness beer family treat their employees so well? Because of their Christian convictions. They treated others the way they wanted to be treated. They treated others, the way God treated them.

Application:

Bosses, are you treating your employees the way you want to be treated?

Are you providing them with the pay, benefits, vacation time, meaningful work, and adequate training that you would want if you were in their shoes?

Bosses must embrace the golden rule! in addition...

Bosses must embrace humility!

Ephesians 6:9 (ESV) — 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Paul says, “look, boss, stop being a jerk to your employees.” Why? “Because you (boss) and your employees have the same master—Jesus Christ—and he will judge you both impartially (or with perfect equity) on the day of final judgment.”

Said another way, “you need to humble yourself because on the day of judgment you will have no advantage over your employer. You will both be judged by God’s perfect righteousness.”

Sobering words...

Bosses, don’t think that you are better than your employees because you make more money than them, have more power than them, or have better ideas than them.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross!

We will all be judged by the same standard. Making more money than your employees is not going to get you into heaven.

The only thing that will matter on that great, glorious, and terrifying day of final judgment is simply this—did you place all your hope and confidence in the righteousness of Jesus Christ?

Conclusion:

How should Christians think about work? To answer this question, we looked at

First, the worker’s plight

Second, the worker’s work

Third, the worker’s boss

Years ago, Dr. C. Everett Koop, later the surgeon general of the United States, gave an address to the Christian Medical Fellowship of England. His talk was titled “Christian Medicine: A Compromise with Mediocrity?” In the address he asked whether Christian doctors are better doctors or worse doctors because of their Christianity. The address encouraged doctors to be better doctors because they serve Christ.” (Boice)

This raises the question I want to leave you with. Does our Christianity make us better workers? If not, something is terribly wrong. Let’s pray...