

Ephesians

6:5-9

Introduction

The Romans regarded *wealth* as desirable but *work* as degrading. Work was done by servants and some sixty-million slaves. We're talking about all kinds of work, not just manual labor. Servants and slaves were both domestic and educated, laborers and professionals.

Slaves especially, but also their masters, were being saved by the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They would then come together for fellowship in the various house churches throughout the empire. Often the slave would be in a position of authority over his master in the organization of the church. It was awkward to say the least. The believers needed teaching from the apostles about how to conduct themselves in these new relationships, and what to do about slavery.

Our first thought is that Christians should act to abolish slavery... *But that is not at all what the New Testament emphasizes.* Don't get me wrong: The Bible doesn't condone slavery, and everywhere its principles are applied slavery will disappear. Still it must be admitted that the Bible never concentrates on the **restructuring** or **reform** of society. It concentrates on the **regeneration** of souls. Society is changed as a result of individuals being saved. Saved individuals don't *overthrow* society, they *undermine* it as they walk with the Lord.

Paul looks right into the face of slaves and tells them to work for their masters *as if they were working directly for Jesus Christ.* And he doesn't flinch talking to masters, telling them to *consider that they will answer to the Lord as their Master.*

You may not be a slave or a master, but you do go to work. If you don't go to work, you still have work to do. Maybe you are a stay-at-home mom. You're not employed, but you have even more work to do than most people who are! Or you might be a student preparing to

one day enter the work force. The teaching here in Ephesians applies to any and all work.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear The Lord By Your Work Ethic, and #2 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear The Lord By Esteeming Your Workers.

#1 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear The Lord
By Your Work Ethic
(v5-8)

This section of Scripture dealing with relationships began in verse twenty-one of chapter five where Paul told all believers to “[submit] to one another in the fear of the Lord.” I have been emphasizing the fear of the Lord as your motivation. If you fear the Lord, you will submit to your roles and responsibilities as they are described in the Bible. If you do not submit to your roles and responsibilities, you do not fear the Lord, despite your protests to the contrary.

Historians sometimes refer to the “Protestant work ethic.” The Protestant Reformation is credited for presenting a new perspective on work. Martin Luther and later John Calvin taught that you could and should serve God through your work. Work has value in and of itself. While the Reformers get the credit for the “Protestant work ethic,” *all they did was rediscover it in the Bible!*

We need to rediscover it! Wherever you work... whatever your work is... whoever you work for... **You** are to have a biblical work ethic.

It is described for you in verses five through eight. In each of those verses there is a reference to the Lord. One way of looking at your work is to say that you really are working for the Lord. While that is essentially true, it can be difficult to put into perspective. You work for Jesus Christ, *but your boss is more like the antiChrist!*

Jesus knows if your boss is more like the antiChrist; in fact, He's allowing it to further your Christian character. You work for Jesus Christ in the sense of recognizing He is working *in* you and wants to work *through* you in your workplace.

Having said that, we can take a look at the biblical work ethic.

Ephesians 6:5 Bondservants...

“Bondservants” is the common word for slaves. Slavery was horrible. I could list atrocities with regards to the treatment of slaves; I won’t. I only mention it to emphasize that if Paul could say these things to slaves under Roman rule, how much more are they applicable to you and I with our rights in the greatest country on earth! Yes, we have *rights* as citizens. But we also have *responsibilities* as citizens of heaven.

I’ve been noting in our studies that often Paul discusses the effect before giving the cause. To put it another way, he tells you how to behave based on what you believe, but he lists the behavior first. He does that here, so I want to begin with what you *believe* – in verse eight - then look at how you *behave* – in verses five, six, and seven.

Here is what you believe:

Ephesians 6:8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free.

You believe that the world is temporary but your work is eternal. You’re looking beyond remuneration to rewards; beyond wages to wealth. The Lord’s pay period isn’t weekly or bi-weekly; it’s at the end of your life on the earth. **All** your work will seem worthwhile when you hear the Lord say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

You are in training for eternity. In the Lord’s Millennial Kingdom you will rule cities, counties, countries, and continents. In eternity you may well govern galaxies.

“Whether [you] are a slave or free” is a radical statement. If they had to remain slaves, *they were to be exemplary slaves!* **You** are to be exemplary in **your** work. Work is never just to *earn a living*; it is to give an *example of living*. Being a Christian transforms your work into a spiritual adventure with the Lord.

If you believe what you are supposed to believe, then you will behave with the work ethic described in verses five, six, and seven. We can identify at least five qualities.

Ephesians 6:5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh,

“Be obedient” is in a present verb tense, meaning that you do your work *always* and at *all times* and not just when your employers are fair and reasonable. The exception would be when you are asked to do something immoral, idolatrous, blasphemous, or the like. Listen to what the apostle Peter said, in First Peter 2:18-20,

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

1 Peter 2:19 For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

1 Peter 2:20 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.

The Lord knows what you are enduring. He wants to work both in you and through you. Your “masters according to the flesh,” that is, on the earth, are allowed by the Lord for your good and His glory.

Ephesians 6:5 ... with fear and trembling...

“With fear and trembling” is the proper respect you show those in authority. Although men terribly abuse their authority, the principle of authority and submission is God-given and must be respected. Respect for their authority doesn’t need to be earned. It is deserved because God is in control. If he wanted to put someone else over you, He could and He would.

Ephesians 6:5 ... in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;

“In sincerity of heart” means you apply yourself fully to your work. It means you are dedicated to the task at hand. It is the opposite of slacking-off on the job. Regardless whether you enjoy your work or not, you should do it with all your heart. Arrive early; leave late; get your work done and ask for more.

Ephesians 6:6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,

“Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart...” You are to work just as hard whether anyone is watching you or not. The Lord is watching you! You are to work beyond the minimum requirements. You should not need to be checked-up on because you are always working to the best of your ability. And you go on working just as hard when you are passed-over for a raise or promotion, or when you are mistreated.

Ephesians 6:7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

“With goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men...”
“Goodwill” is a word that transforms work from *duty* to *devotion*. You want to work because it is “service” for the Lord, not for men.

The Gospel ultimately affected slavery as an *institution*... But first it affected slaves as *individuals*. The Gospel that *transformed* them gave them a work ethic that *transcended* their circumstances. It ought to do the same for us in our workplace.

#2 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear The Lord
By Esteeming Your Workers
(v9)

Paul’s comments to masters were no less radical and revolutionary. In a culture where people were considered property, he elevated the stature of all men to equality before God.

Verse nine is addressed to Christians in authority over others. While it may also be good advice to unbelievers, it requires the filling of the Holy Spirit to accomplish it.

Ephesians 6:9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

“Do the same thing” refers back to “doing the will of God from the heart.” If you are in a position of authority, it is by God’s will and *not* by your own intelligence or effort.

The Christian in authority is told to not abuse his *power* or his *position*.

Don't abuse your power:

"[Give] up threatening." "Threatening" is an accurate description of the methods normally used in the workplace. Fear and intimidation are how most firms treat their people. "Giving up" suggests the idea of *loosening up*, or *releasing*. The Christian in authority uses it as little as possible and does not throw his weight around or lord it over those under him.

Don't abuse your position:

"Knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."

Authority, though God-given, is strictly functional and temporary. The faithful Christian employer knows that he is a fellow servant of Jesus Christ with his employees, and is accountable to the same "Master." He also knows that before God he is no more important or worthy in himself than the least of his employees, because "there is no partiality with Him."

Imagine how mind-blowing this was in first century Rome! Slaves had no rights, yet Paul was telling Christian masters to concentrate on their responsibilities to treat slaves right. How much more should Christians in authority in our freedom loving society heed this exhortation.

I think it is tougher to be a Christian **in** authority than one **under** authority. Everyone wants to take advantage of you – *including believers*. When you apply the Jesus-style of leadership and authority, you are ridiculed as weak and ineffective. No matter! You are Spirit-filled and are to be an example of Jesus to others.

Conclusion

If you fear the Lord, you will adopt a biblical work ethic, and you will esteem your workers. Your work, and your workplace, will be transformed as you train for eternity.

