

Ephesians 6:5-8 –Being an Employee in Modern Times

Gill, JFB, Gaebelein, TSK, GreekLexicon, Abbot, Handfuls, Barnes, Calvin, Clarke, Eclectic, Family, Geneva, Henry, Poole, Robertson, Trapp, INT
Beloved congregation of Jesus: **There are very few slaves today**. There are some in North Africa and some who do slave labor in Asian prisons. **There no bondservants today** – those who sold themselves into slavery to pay-off a debt.

So, to whom does this passage of Scripture apply in today's world? While we don't have slaves and bondservants, we do have "public servants" and "private servants," who are also known as employees. And even if you don't work at a job, you are probably married to a "servant," or are a child to a "servant," or an elder to a "servant," or a friend to a "servant." **God used the harshest form of servanthood to represent all servanthood**. So everyone has duties outlined in this passage.

Hear God's instructions about how a servant should live in modern times.

Our headings are:

Who were these bondservants?

What did God require of them?

How would God reward them?

Our goals: **That you will reflect whose you are (the Lord's) by how you work so your boss and those around you will praise God.**

Who were these Bondservants?

5 **Bondservants**, be obedient to those who are your **masters according to the flesh**

1. After addressing husband, wives, children, and parents, Apostle Paul then addressed bondservants, teaching them how they should live before the Lord.

2. Who were these bond servants?

a. There were over 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire, about 1/3 of the population. These servants could have been captured in war and forced into slavery, but most were voluntary slaves (bondservants) who enslaved themselves to pay-off a great debt they or their family owed.

b. A number of these bondservants were becoming Christians, so Apostle Paul had to address issues that were coming up.

3. Apostle Paul reminded bondservants their masters were only masters over the bondservants' bodies; their masters did not control the bondservants' souls.

Knowing the limit of their masters' control, the Apostle hoped to soften the harshness of the slaves' condition.

4. Lessons:

a. All employees are servants. Yes, we live in a time when individualism is at the center of society. The idea of being a servant to others seems repulsive in our “me-too” and “self-esteem” movements, but God reminds us that some are servants. This helps to keep order. (There would be chaos if all were equal.) And we need order to establish Christ’s kingdom.

b. Why was slavery permitted?

God was pleased to have men remain in slavery for a time for their own sanctification.

God was pleased to have men remain in slavery to test their masters’ charity. They should have made life easier.

God was pleased to have men remain in slavery for his own glory. All things work out for God’s glory. Even when God allowed his 11 children to be martyred in Nigeria on Christmas Day (and a number of others since), it was for his glory. He could have stopped it, but he didn’t. Your existence in this world is for God’s glory.

But be clear of this: Christianity is not a friend to slavery. God was working to end enslavement with the principles he put in place. (Of course, there were those who used Christianity as a pretext for slavery, but wherever Christianity spread, slavery was abolished.)

c. Don’t assume because you have become a Christian your life will automatically become better and those over you will treat you better. Often your life is not better. You may still be sick, or you may have trouble finding the job you want. You may suffer to some degree. What God guarantees is he will be with you. He will sanctify you. Even if you don’t understand why things are happening to you, trust him. Remember how Mary and Joseph were told to go to Egypt, of all places, to protect their Son? That might have seemed strange, but that was what was best for them, as they found out.

What did God require of them?

5 **... be obedient** to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with **fear and trembling**, in **sincerity** of heart, **as to Christ**;

1. Apostle Paul taught all bondservants were to serve their masters obediently.

2. Apostle Paul taught bondservants were to obey their masters with “fear and trembling.”

He focused not only on the fact of obedience (servants knew they needed to obey outwardly), but he also focused on the quality of obedience. The natural tendency is to have resentment against a master, even if servant obeyed outwardly.

“Fear and Trembling” means humility - reverentially! So Apostle Paul was focusing on the heart’s obedience!

3. Apostle Paul taught bondservants must obey with “sincerity,” meaning they were to serve with “singleness” of heart.

This is set in opposition to “duplicity,” having a 2nd motive... This is like appearing good

and then having the ulterior motive to undermine a supervisor.

Requiring sincerity in obedience makes obedience more difficult. You might be able to **hold your nose and obey someone who is not nice,** but the Lord goes further and **requires you obey those over you with sincerity.** So this is spiritual work.

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.

Remember Naaman's young Jewish servant girl...she put her master's welfare above her own and what a wonderful thing happened. Her master was converted!

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,

4. Apostle Paul taught bondservants were to obey their masters even when they were not watching.

Most people feel pressure to obey their bosses when they are watching...but it is easy to put your tool down when the boss is gone. (You know how children suddenly forget their chores when parents are not watching?) That was an ancient problem.

But there is an additional complication: The bondservant didn't receive a regular salary like a paid worker. So it was even more **difficult for the bondservant to watch others get paid and he was not!** But here is an additional warning:

1 Timothy 6:1 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.

5. Apostle Paul then taught bondservants not to curry-favor (be men-pleasers) with those over them.

Why is this wrong? The servant must always remember that **his first goal in life is to please God**...and sometimes that will run contrary to what might please a boss.

6. Apostle Paul taught bondservants to obey their masters as they obey Christ – from the heart – not as if the masters were mere men.

(He aimed for their hearts!) If you had to obey your bosses as mere men it would be very hard, especially if your bosses were not good, **but if you are to obey them as you obey Christ, you have to do so from the heart.**

7. Apostle Paul taught servants to obey their masters with goodwill – seeking the good of the master.

This is hard to do it. This is why you start with your relationship with Jesus Christ. Serve you boss like you serve Christ.

8. Lessons:

a. All employees are expected to obey those over them – their supervisors or their bosses.

b. God shows no partiality to the poor or underprivileged. Don't steal from your boss because he is underpaying you. Don't get to be lazy when the boss is not watching or because he is hard on you when he is watching. Don't use the government to overtax so they could give you your "fair share." Your "fair share" is code for socialism-overtaxing the rich to give to the less rich-with the use of prison as a threat.

c. Today we err in that we allow people to get out of debt by government law, laws like bankruptcy. While debtors should not be treated as cruelly as they were in the Roman Empire, there is no ground for absconding from paying a debt one owes. Being legal doesn't make something moral!

d. You have to examine your heart and your relationship with Christ when you think about how to serve your boss. There is no dual life. **You don't have your religious life and your economic life.** Your religious life is inextricably linked to your economic life. Simply put: **If you keep looking to Jesus, you won't focus on the unfair treatment of life.** This is true for every relationship in your life.

e. Encourage your husbands, father, children, co-workers, or friends to submit to and be patient with their boss if conditions of their employment are harsh, if that is where they must work. Show sympathy if they need it, but don't encourage rebellion, undermining, or disrespect to their bosses.

How would God Reward them?

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

1. If servants obeyed their master from the heart, in sincerity, with fear and trembling, and with the intention of pleasing Christ, Christ would reward them in the end.

2. Specifically, God will reward servants because those good works they do for their masters are ultimately good works to God.

3. What are good rewards?

a. They may have received blessings in this life. There are historical wills that showed owners of slaves freed them for their good behavior and even left inheritances. But that is only sometimes!

b. They received eternal rewards in heaven, guaranteed – for every good work they did.

Colossians 3:23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, **24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the**

inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

It didn't matter if one were a slave with limited opportunities or a freed man. All were rewarded.

4. Lessons:

a. As a servant, you will be rewarded for your faithfulness, maybe in this life, but surely in the next.

b. Knowing rewards are promised to those who work hard, work hard and with sincerity and diligence.

c. Knowing the rewards that are promised to those who worked hard for their boss, this would cause the employees to patiently endure all kinds of hardships. It is delayed gratification.

d. If you want to see your husband, father, friend, co-worker, or brother in Christ be blessed with eternal blessings, encourage him to work with sincerity and diligence at his job.

Conclusion:

Servants were expected to obey their masters as they would obey Christ himself...even though their masters might have been harsh and overly-demanding. Obedience was not just to be outward but inward as well...from singleness of heart! While God did not immediately caused slavery to end, he promised to reward servants, maybe on earth and certainly in heaven, for their service and suffering in this world.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Accept unfair treatment and suffering from a boss and even from the harsh political and religious leaders. If you are legitimately able to get out, like from a bad job, you may do that. But God may use a difficult situation to help sanctify you, like teaching you patience and how to forgive!

2. Accept suffering because Christ suffered for you and you are his!

3. Don't contribute to your suffering by being a bad employee.

4. If you are not a servant, you know one! Encourage him to serve his boss honorably

5. Your Savior will reward you for your suffering, maybe in this life, but surely in the life to come.

Finally, God's laws are for all men, so if you are not a Christian, you can't submit to your boss properly. In order to do this, you need to have a change of heart – something only Jesus can you. Ask him to do that.