

Ephesians 6:5-9 Answers Slaves & Masters

Review:

This section of Ephesians began back in 4:17 (read aloud) and runs all way to 6:9 (we are almost to the end of it). In it Paul urges believers to no longer live like the pagan Gentiles live. Instead, we are to walk in love and light. Like an old coat, we are to take off the old man and put on the new man. This whole section is about being transformed in Christ. Paul first gave general renewal admonitions to everyone (4:17-5:21), followed by renewal admonitions to specific groups (husbands, wives, fathers, children, slaves, masters).

Introduction: When was the last time you had to do something that you really did not want to do, especially as it relates to your job? Today's lesson is about how to make even the menial meaningful. The key is to get a biblical perspective on our jobs and lives.

— Obey —

******What attitude should slaves have when obeying their masters (6:5-9)?** In short, Christian slaves should obey their masters as they would Jesus himself.

NAS **Colossians 3:22** Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

What is a slave (6:5)? A slave (*doulos*) is a person bound in servitude as the actual property of another person. He is not free; he is in forced labor. In America we typically think of slavery in terms of black enslavement, yet white enslavement was common in Europe for centuries. Our English word slave is derived from the fact that the Slavic peoples were widely enslaved in the A.D. 1100s. It was common for the Romans to have Greek slaves. It is estimated that a third of the population of Ephesus were in slavery (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2273). Some of these slaves had become followers of Jesus and were active in the Ephesian church.

Slavery was an accepted institution in the Roman Empire, an integral part of their society. Not only were some of the believers in the Ephesian church slaves, but it may surprise you to learn there were also slave holders in the Ephesian church! (More on slavery at the end of the lesson, time permitting).

1. Why might a slave find these instructions hard to swallow (6:5-8)? A slave is typically not compensated for his labor (thus having no incentive to work hard) and further might resent being owned by someone else. All his labor would be to another person's profit. It would be easy for him to have a bad attitude, poor work ethic and to be apathetic. There is a reason slave owners resorted to the whip for motivation. This apathy is expressed well in this old Southern slavery song:

Jimmy Crack Corn: When I was young I used to wait, on my ole master and hold his plate. I'd pass the jug when he went dry, and brush away the blue tail fly . . . The donkey run, he buck he pitch, he threw my master in the ditch. He died, an' de jury wonder'd why; De verdic was de blue tail fly. Jimmy crack corn and I don't care, Jimmy crack corn and I don't care, Jimmy crack corn and I don't care, My master's gone away.

What is the modern Western dynamic equivalent to a slave (6:5)? Even though our country has outlawed slavery, the instructions Paul gave to Christian slaves and Christian masters back then are equally applicable to employees and employers in our society. Another parallel would be a person conscripted into military service (drafting people in the army is a form of slavery). Another parallel might be a prisoner assigned to a work detail.

Getting Down to Basics: What does it mean to obey someone (6:5)? Obey is from *hupakouo*; literally “to hear under”. To obey is to place one’s self under authority and listen to various commands issued. *Hupakouo* is the same word used in 6:1 with reference to children obeying their parents.

Being a servant is a high calling! Jesus our Lord came to earth as a servant. We are being Christ-like when we serve others.

ESV Philippians 2:4-8 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant (*doulos*), being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Paul wrote that slaves were to obey their earthly masters. Why did Paul insert the word earthly (6:5) before the word masters (6:5)? Christian slaves had two masters: an earthly master and a heavenly master. In obeying the earthly master the Christian slave is also obeying His heavenly master.

Word Study: “Masters” (6:5) is from *kurios*, the common word for a slave holder. Often it is translated “lord”, especially with reference to Jesus.

— Fear & Trembling —

2. What does it look like to obey with fear and trembling (6:5)? First, this means that obeying with a bad attitude is far out of place. Second, it suggests an obedience that is circumspect and earnestness, just as a person in a life or death with act with fear and trembling. In short, it refers to the seriousness with which assigned tasks should be approached. This is especially applicable in this case since a slave would normally have little incentive to do a good job.

Does fear and trembling (6:5) describe the earnestness with which you do your job? If not, why not? It does not matter if you are working for someone else or not. Does this describe the way you approach schooling? Home making? Child training? Home schooling?

3. What difference would it make in a person's work if he obeyed his boss with fear and trembling (6:5)?

— A Sincere Heart —

4. What does it mean to obey with a sincere heart (6:5)? Greek word here literally means singleness. The KJV has "singleness" of heart. The word conveys the total absence of hypocrisy or pretense, the avoidance of duplicity. It is an attitude of undivided effort. It denotes integrity.

(Heart is from *kardia*, used here to refer to the seat of a person's thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes or endeavors).

ESV **Ecclesiastes 9:10** Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might . . .

ESV **Proverbs 22:29** Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.

The Work Witness: An effective way to bear Christian witness on the job is to put in an honest, good day's work. Douglas Hyde, in *Dedication and Leadership*, records how communist operatives in a factory were trained to first be the best workers they possibly could be and only later, having earned the respect of their co-workers, begin talking about communism.

ESV **Titus 2:9-10** Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

— As You Would Christ —

Look at 6:5 and complete this statement: Slaves are to obey their earthly masters as _____ (what?). Slaves should obey their earthly masters as they would Christ (6:5)

Application: Our attitude should be "I work for Jesus" (no matter what company you work for or what you are doing). Our society pressures us not to mix business and religion. Yet as it relates to our motivation and perspective, we are very much to mix the two!

5. Paul wrote for the slave to obey "as you would Christ" (6:5). What other duties did Paul already give in Ephesians that are to be done as to Christ or as Christ did? See 5:22, 5:25. Wives are to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" and husbands are to love their wives "as Christ loved the church".

6. How might a Christian slave who obeyed as he would Christ (6:5) work differently than a typical slave? See *Genesis 39:2-6, 21-23*. A Christian slave should earn the same reputation that Joseph had, wherein his master could trust him to do or be in charge of anything. The Lord gave Joseph favor in the eyes of his masters because God's plan was to use later Joseph to save the Hebrews from starvation, but the principle of being a trustworthy servant never-the-less remains:

ESV **Genesis 39:1-6** . . . Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him . . . and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had . . . he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

ESV **Genesis 39:22-23**. . . the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge . . .

When you go to work every day, is your attitude that you are really working for Christ (6:5)? If not, what can you do to change your perspective?

— Eye-Service People-Pleasers —

According to 6:6, how are slaves not to obey their masters? Christian slaves are not to obey by way of eye-service as people-pleasers.

7. How would you define eye-service, people-pleasing obedience (6:6)? Eye service is doing something mostly for show, to make a situation appear to be other than it really is. It is a form of deception. It is pretending to be a good worker.

Examples: One example would be a lazy employee who jumps into activity when the boss approaches. Another example is an employee who walks around with paperwork or clipboard in his hand so it appears he is on a mission.

Test: Is your work activity different when you boss is present versus when he is away? Should there be any difference?

— Servants of Christ —

8. Based on 6:6, instead of working as people pleasers, how should we work? We are not to obey as people pleasers, but "as servants of Christ". No matter who an employee works for or where he works, he is really working for Christ.

For the believer there is no difference between the sacred and the secular. All work is holy and is to be unto the Lord.

As to Christ, 2nd Time (6:6): Take note that this is now the second time in as many verses that slaves are instructed to obey their masters as they would Christ. This is an important concept for every Christian to grasp.

NAS Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

What is the difference between a slave (6:5) and a servant (6:6)? In English there is a big difference, but both are from the same Greek word, *doulos* (which fundamentally means slave, BAGD, p. 205). Paul, James and Peter each described himself as a *doulos* (slave) of Christ:

ESV Romans 1:1 Paul, a servant (*doulos*, slave) of Christ Jesus . . .

ESV James 1:1 James, a servant (*doulos*, slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

ESV 2 Peter 1:1 Simeon Peter, a servant (*doulos*, slave) and apostle of Jesus Christ . . .

ESV Jude 1:1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ . . .

ESV Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants (*doulos*, slave) the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant (*doulos*, slave) John . . .

9. Based on the last part of 6:6, when a slave carries out the will of his master, whose will is he really doing? He is in reality doing the will of God. God often expresses His will to us through our earthly authorities (bosses, parents, teachers, government).

Divine Work: In stating that we are to see our work as doing the will of God, Paul is again pointing out the divine nature of work. When you write a computer program at work you are doing the will of God. When you make a sale, you are doing the will of God. When you install an electrical outlet, you are doing the will of God. When you compound a drug, you are doing the will of God. When you restock shelving, you are doing the will of God. When you calculate the cost of transporting freight, you are doing the will of God. When you teach kids math, you are doing the will of God. When you drive a delivery truck, you are doing the will of God. When you blow leaves or cut the grass, you are doing the will of God. One word for worship, *latreia*, originally referred to the work of hired hands. It is an action word of worship through service.

— From the Heart —

10. The last work quality mentioned in 6:6 is that slaves should obey “from the heart”.
What does it mean to obey “from the heart” (6:6)? Interestingly, the Greek word for heart (*kardia*) is not here. Instead it is *psuché* (basis for psyche), which carries the idea soul or person. *Psuché* can overlap in meaning with *kardia* in the sense of an inner motivating force.

— A Good Will —

According to 6:7, what should go along with a slave's service? The slave should render his service with a good will, as to the Lord and not to man.

What is good will (6:7)? It is from a single word, *eunoia*, literally good thinking. It is an attitude work, denoting cheerful acquiescence or willingness. Christian workers should do their jobs without complaining.

— As to the Lord —

As to the Lord, 3rd Time (6:7): This is the third time slaves are told to serve “as to the Lord” (6:7).

11. Why did Paul repeat over and over that slaves were to work as to the Lord (6:7)? This obviously was a message that Christian slaves really needed to hear (and as does any employee). We must ever bear this perspective in mind as we labor.

Why did Paul add, “and not to man” (6:7)? Our attitude as servants is to be so much on serving the Lord by obeying our divine Master that it is as if our earthly masters don't even have a say in our tasks (we serve as to the Lord and not to man).

ESV 1 Peter 2:18-20 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. (There will always be inequity, injustice and bone headed bosses who are overbearing, control freaks or abusive.)

— Knowing —

12. What information did Paul impart in 6:8 that slaves were to keep in mind? Paul wanted them to remember that whatever good they do in service will be paid back by the Lord. In a situation where a slave is working without pay, this hope of eternal reward could be extremely motivating and encouraging.

Some bosses may be unaware of the good work done, or unappreciative of it, or credit may even go to someone else. However, the Lord knows and rewards all those who do good.

Benedict Arnold: Arnold's name is synonymous with betrayal in the cause for American independence. Part of Arnold's problem was that he did not believe the promise made here in Ephesian 6:8 about the Lord repaying us. Credit for an important battle he won went instead to his commanding officer, evidently fueling within Arnold an unholy discontentment that eventually led to betrayal.

13. Why did Paul add the words “whether he is a slave or free” (6:8)? He may have written this to reassure the slave that God would reward him for his work as surely as any free man would be rewarded. It is all a matter of perspective. Also, not everyone in Ephesus was a slave. Some were simply hired employees or had their own businesses. They too would be rewarded by the Lord.

Note: In each of the four verses written to slaves, Paul mentioned the Lord (or Christ or God). Christ revolutionized their lives in what often was a difficult situation (Coleman & Peace, *Mastering The Basics, Ephesians*, p. 59).

What word does 1 Timothy 6:1-2 have for Christian slaves who had Christian masters?

ESV 1 Timothy 6:1-2 Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.

******How should Christian masters interact with their slaves (6:9)?** Masters should do the same to them.

14. What does it mean for masters to “do the same” (6:9) for their slaves? This is probably a reference back to 6:8 (doing good to them). Paul is not teaching that masters should obey slaves, but rather that masters do them good (6:8). Masters were to treat their slaves with respect and seek to glorify God in how they related to them. Masters are to look out for the welfare of their slaves.

What were masters to stop doing (6:9)? They were to stop threatening their slaves.

ESV Leviticus 25:43 You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.

What would you imagine the nature of these threats were (6:9)? In the Roman Empire, masters had the power of life or death over their slaves. Beatings, imprisonment and being sold off to harsher conditions were common punishments (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2273).

15. Why would threatening be inappropriate for a Christian master (6:9)? Christian masters are to be positive and not negative in their approach to management. Myriads of books have been written on different management styles. Teddy Roosevelt said to speak softly and carry a big stick. Clearly, some management styles are more in keeping with the commands of Christ than are others. Bosses whose management style involves intimidation, bullying, belittling, cursing and threatening are not Christ-like.

Paul wanted the masters to realize (“knowing”) that both master and slave have the same Master in heaven and that God will show no partiality between slave or free man on judgment day and in heaven. They were both children of the heavenly Father.

So What?

16. How will Ephesians 6:5-9 impact the way you do things at work?

ESV 1 **Thessalonians 4:10-12** . . . we urge you, brothers . . . to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

ESV 1 **Corinthians 10:31** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Lagniappe:

The Bible & Slavery

What aspect of slavery is clearly condemned in Exodus 21:16? Kidnapping people for the purpose of selling them into slavery is condemned in the Law of Moses.

ESV **Exodus 21:16** Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

The American Experience: Most African slaves became enslaved by kidnapping, a clear violation of Exodus 21:16. Sadly, their fellow Africans raided peaceful areas and sold them to British slave traders along the African coast. Though slavery was legal in all thirteen colonies, the Virginia colony passed a bill to outlaw the importation of slaves. Sadly, the law was overturned by the British Privy Council. Though closely aligned with slavery, the Confederacy in its constitution did prohibit the importation of any slaves into the Confederate States. Even though the Northern States outlawed slavery, nearly all international slave trading vessels were registered in Northern ports. They profited greatly from the slave trade whilst condemning slavery itself. For example, Faneuil Hall in Boston, made famous as a meeting place for those advocating American independence from Britain, was built by Peter Faneuil, a wealthy slave trader.

What can be learned about slavery in ancient Israel from Exodus 21, Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15 & 23? In short, the ancient Israelites were not allowed to own one another as slaves. There was a system of indentured servitude, but it was limited to six years. However, the Israelites were allowed to own foreigners (pagans) as slaves. Yet even then there could not be abuse and special cities of refuge were established for slaves who ran away from an abusive master.

What are the New Testament's teachings on slavery? See *Matthew 7:12, Ephesians 6:5-9 and 1 Corinthians 7:21*. One of the excuses Mark Twain gave for not being a Christian is the failure of the Bible to condemn slavery. It is a fact that although the New Testament does not advocate slavery, but neither is it condemned. Rather, it accommodates and regulates slavery. Based on such passages as **Matthew 7:12** many Christians (such as John Wesley, George Whitefield and William Wilberforce) have worked to end slavery.

KJV **Matthew 7:12** . . . whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them . . .

Is slavery a sin? Why? See *Ephesians 6:9, Philemon 1*. If slavery were automatically a moral sin, the Law of Moses would have condemned the owning of pagans as slaves and the New Testament would have urged the church discipline process against such slave holders as Philemon.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and then something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

Teacher's note: These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you send out each lesson's questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Coving each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

Stephen E. Atkerson

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