

Heavenly Master Ephesians 6:8-9

Introduction

Our text this evening starts mid-sentence and overlaps what Stephen Mansfield covered a couple weeks ago. Verse 9 is new material for us, but is tied to the information in the preceding verses.

In order to make sense of it, we need to start in verse 5.

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.

A bondservant was a slave, and much of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves—some 60 million of them. They constituted the major work force in the

empire. Slavery was a necessary and commonly accepted part of the whole economic system. Nobody imagined that it could be any different.

Many slaves were domestic household workers. Many others were manual laborers in the field. Slavery was not confined to some particular ethnicity or minority group. Slaves came from many different nations. Many were highly educated—lawyers, doctors, teachers. Some were slaves through war. Others had sold themselves as slaves to pay off debt, like an indentured servant, almost an employee, except that the bondservant was housed, clothed, and fed on the master's estate. They could be inherited or purchased. That said, hundreds of years earlier Aristotle defined a slave as a living tool, and that same low view of slaves continued.

Since the gospel of Christ reached all people groups, the first-century church included free men and slaves, masters and their bondservants. The question was how their faith in Christ should impact their relationship as brothers in Christ.

We've seen that the gospel transforms relationships, whether husband and wife, children and parents, or master and slave. One of the results of the Holy Spirit's taking control of a us—filling us—is that we live

“submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

We would expect that the way masters treated slaves and the way slaves treated masters would be very different because of the huge difference in their status. But their relationship to Christ, who is Lord of both Christian masters and Christian slaves, governed how they treated one another. Heavenly Master.

Principles like what Paul articulates here served to remove much of the sting from life as a slave, and in time led to the abolition of slavery in many regions of the world where the gospel traveled.

1. Respectful Behavior (9a)
2. Faithful Service (9b)
3. Righteous Reward (9c)

1. Respectful Behavior (9a)

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening,

Do the same to them—treat your slaves like your slaves are supposed to treat you. How is that? At first thought, that seems impossible. But remember how Paul has commanded the bondslaves to treat their masters: whatever they do they are to do it for Christ, not just

their earthly masters. Well, whatever the masters do, they are to do it as to Christ.

Slaves were to serve not as people pleasers but from the heart, rendering service with good will as to the Lord. Masters were to show good will toward their servants as they would treat Christ. How we treat other human beings made in God's image shows what we think of God Himself, whatever the age or status of the person with whom we interact.

Titus 3: speak evil of no one; perfect courtesy toward all people

Stop your threatening—let up on such harsh treatment, relax it—threatening is the opposite of respectful treatment. Threat of punishment and the use of punishment was seen as the way to keep slaves under control. But human relationships do not thrive on threats. Threats show a lack of relationship.

Certainly there are times when consequences for bad behavior must fall on whoever does wrong, but the masters were not to mistreat their slaves with threats of harm. Instead they were to model the behavior they expected. Because they too answer to a heavenly master.

Application

- How do you treat those over you and under you in the workplace?
- What needs to change so that how you treat others shows you are serving Christ when you interact with them?

2. Faithful Service (9b)

knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven,

The masters were to be faithful in their work, just as they expected their slaves to be faithful in theirs.

Slaves had no rights in the Roman Empire, but God ruled over the Empire and the universe itself. He holds people accountable no matter what their political or economic status is.

No one gets away with bad behavior. Might does not make right. Some people do wrong to others simply because they can. But they answer to God. He sees. He hears. He knows. And He will deal with it. You bully and mistreat people just because you rank higher than they do, and you will answer for it.

Applications

- In what ways is your treatment of others characterized by the faithfulness that Christ deserves?

- What about your work shows unfaithfulness, and what needs to change?

3. Righteous Reward (9c)

and that there is no partiality with him.

God is not impressed with your job title, your family wealth, or with how many people you have say over. He rules over the universe, including you. You can't bribe Him. He already owns everything.

Ephesians 6:8

knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

A stingy master is an evil master. A good master, like a good boss or employer, loves to reward work well done. Jesus Christ is a good Master. He is not stingy. His reward goes beyond what we could ever earn. Who could ever earn a residence in the heavenly city, capital of the universe, living among the saints and angels before the throne of God? Who could ever build up enough merit to gain access to the new heaven and new earth. Who could purchase immortality or work their way to sinlessness?

Christ frequently talks about rewarding His servants. Who can forget the words in one of

His parables, "Well done, you good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord." He intends His reward to be motivational to us, especially when we encounter mistreatment and hardship for the sake of the gospel.

Matthew 5:11-12

¹¹ Blessed (happy) are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

So Paul can write from house arrest in Rome in his letter to the Colossians similar words to what he writes to the Ephesian believers.

Colossians 3:23-25

²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

No servant of Christ, master or slave, will go unrewarded. Nor will Christ fail to deal with wrongdoing. Both master and slave answer to Jesus. He holds both accountable. And He rewards both righteously.

Applications

- Let the thought that Christ unfailingly rewards His servants motivate how you carry out your responsibilities well, whatever they may be.
- Stop worrying that you are not getting paid what you're worth. Jesus is not stingy. You will reign with Him.

Conclusion

Our workplace culture is different in many ways from the way things worked in the Roman Empire, but these principles remain in force today, whatever your status in society. We all have a Heavenly Master, and that fact calls for

1. Respectful Behavior (9a)
2. Faithful Service (9b)

For Christ will give a

3. Righteous Reward (9c)