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Ephesians 6:5-9 “Gaining a New Attitude at Work”

Intro. I’m sure you recall the story of *The Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Before Mr. Scrooge had a change of heart by the visits of Christmas angels, he was the most inconsiderate employer a person could possibly be. He required Bob Cratchet to work without a break, to work holidays, and to support his family on meager wages. You may feel like you are working for a Scrooge. Well if you will follow the teaching of my text, your attitude toward work could be transformed even if your job is difficult, and even if you work for a Scrooge. Also, if there are any bosses listening to me who are like Scrooge to any degree, my text could transform you better than the Christmas angels of that story!

In chapter 5 Paul deals with the subject of the Christian home. Now Paul turns his attention to another major aspect of everyday life, and that is work. There is a connection here. In the apostle’s day there were servants in the household, and most household servants were slaves. And so vv.5-8 are addressed primarily to slaves for several reasons. First, slavery was very common in the Roman world. I’ve been told that at least 1/3 of the population of the Roman Empire was comprised of those who were slaves. More than half the people seen on the streets of some of the great cities of the Roman world were slaves. Slavery, even with all its attendant evils, was universally accepted in ancient times. Secondly, it is likely that more than half of the Christians that Paul was addressing in this letter to the Ephesians were slaves, for many of the early converts to Christianity were slaves. So this teaching of Paul was very relevant to many of them. Thankfully, through the influence of Christianity, slavery has largely been eradicated in the world. The New Testament gives teaching which basically undermines the fabric and fiber of the institution of slavery. In fact, once the Roman Empire embraced Christianity in the 4th Century, the practice became far less common. But it is still being practiced in some areas of the world even today.

I firmly believe that this text of Scripture *applies* to all Christian employees, and much of what I say can even apply to volunteer and household work. In the last of v.8 Paul addresses all who perform a service for others, “whether slave or free.” Work is a major part of life from the time of our youth, until we are able to retire. Many spend more time at work than any other single activity, including sleep. This is a major part of our life. Furthermore, the job that most Christian people go to is a real mission field. How we conduct ourselves on the job can be a positive or negative witness for the Lord. So we need to know what God says about such an important subject. To many, work is a bad, but indispensable part of life. To the Christian, it can be transformed into a joyful experience, even if you are doing a difficult job. This teaching of the apostle Paul could solve some of the problems between labor and management today.

But I want to say up front that what Paul says here to slaves and employees is directed to *Christians*. He sets forth a standard that is perhaps difficult, even for a Christian to live by. If you are not yet a born-again Christian, you will find this perhaps impossible to live by. But once you become a Christian, you *can* live by a higher standard of Christian morality, for God promises in His Word that He will work within you, “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Furthermore, this is still in the context of living the Spirit-filled life (5:18). As you are filled with the Holy Spirit even at work, you can live the way I will describe, even in a difficult job environment.

So let's see first of all:

I. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CHRISTIAN WORKER

Let's start with a perspective that I believe is foundational. First of all, you need to:

A. See Yourself as Serving Christ, Not Man – Note in vv.5-7 the recurrence of “as”. Paul says we are to do all this “as unto Christ”, “as bondservants of Christ,” and “as to the Lord.” In other words, when you go to work each day, you need to keep in mind that you are primarily working for the Lord Jesus Christ, not that employer. The employer is just the instrument that God is using in your life to accomplish His purposes. Who do you work for? Do you work for a company, a factory or some other institution? Yes, but who else do you work for? If you are a Christian the Bible says that you ultimately work for Jesus Christ.

So if my employment is digging ditches, I am to dig ditches from my heart as unto the Lord. Paul tells the worker that if he hopes to find his work a source of joy and not tension, he must try to make it an expression of obedience to Christ. Their service viewed this way would lift the most menial task to the highest level and constitute strong motivation for carrying it out. This could change your whole attitude to your job.

So to have a good attitude on the job, see yourself as serving Christ. Next:

B. Seek to Do A Good Job - I believe Christians ought to be the best employees a person could hire. Your service on a job, the way you work on that job ought to be a testimony to your coworkers and to your boss that Jesus Christ has changed your life and that you work the way you do because of Jesus Christ.

Now I have gleaned from our text 5 guidelines for doing a good job as Christian employees. First of all:

1. Do Your Job Obediently – In v.5 Paul says, “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh....” Here is another application of the principle of submission that is the keynote of this entire section (5:22ff). *Be obedient*, servants are told. When you are an employee, you should do what you're told to do. Do your job assignments. Follow company rules. Of course, there are exceptions. This does not mean you are to do something that is morally wrong. But it *does* mean that you are to submit to authority and carry out your assignments as best you possibly can. A man who hires himself out for a stipulated wage has a responsibility to his employer. To do less than an honest day's work when there is work to do is a form of theft, as I see it.

2. Do your Job Conscientiously – Notice in v.5 that you are to “be obedient” on the job “with fear and trembling.” Those words speak of a conscientious concern in doing the responsibilities received and leaving nothing undone. It could even have a reference toward the Lord, as in 5:21. It was “in fear and in much trembling” that Paul came among the Corinthians as the servant of Christ (1 Cor. 2:3), lest he fail both them and his Lord. “Fear and trembling” befits anyone to whom the Lord has assigned a task. Thus, all true believers are called upon to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). So this is a phrase that is used elsewhere to refer to conscientious service. The parallel passage in Colossians 3:22 enjoins servants to render obedience “fearing God.” So when you go to work each day, you should be mindful that you are accountable to Someone much higher than your boss for the kind of job you do.

3. Do Your Job with Integrity - The words in v.5 “in sincerity of heart” also qualify “be obedient”. That is, they are to serve with an undivided mind, with integrity and uprightness. The word (*haplotes*) speaks of serving with sincerity, honesty, and free from pretense or self-seeking. Furthermore, this means serving without duplicity, no tricky doubleness, not pretending to be a friend of the “boss” to his face while speaking ill of him behind his back. There must be no hypocrisy or pretense.

I believe Paul gives an example of what he is talking about. In v.6 Paul says that we are to do our jobs “not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers....” “Eyeservice” graphically depicts the conduct of the person who works only when he is watched. Do you work as hard and as diligently when the boss is not around as you do when he *is* around? Those who slow down their pace when not under the eye of the foreman or manager, but who works well when being watched, are guilty of seeking favor that they do not deserve. All such Paul calls “men-pleasers,” those who seek to curry favor with men in authority. If the aim of employees is to be *men-pleasers*, they will give service only in the things that are seen by men, or when there is a strong accountability process. These days security cameras can monitor workers. Christians should not need such to do a good job.

I’ve got news for you—somebody else besides your boss is looking. Jesus is looking all the time. In the last of v.6 Paul says we are to serve “as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” The Christian’s ideal is for his daily work, seen or unseen by men, to be accepted as *the will of God*, rejoiced in, and done not by constraint or carelessly but because it is His will. A Christian should do his work as capably, as competently, and as conscientiously as he can.

Application: So make sure you are giving good, honest service to your employer, regardless of whether he or she is looking.

4. Do your Job Enthusiastically – Paul says in v.7, “with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.” The word translated “goodwill” (*eunoia*), literally a good mind, is found only here and 1 Cor. 7:3 in the New Testament. The Arndt & Gingrich lexicon define it as referring to zeal and enthusiasm. Generally, the word refers to a kind, favorable attitude toward someone else, to be well disposed. So here in our text, it probably refers to service rendered with zeal and enthusiasm as unto a close friend or family member. We would also say that it is work rendered cheerfully, or wholeheartedly. In fact, Colossians 3:23 says, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.” The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might....” Wholehearted effort must characterize the Christian employee. Rom. 12:11 says that we are to be “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord....”

Illustration: [Tell how this teaching transformed my work as a student, at the paper mill, and then as a pastor.]

But you say, “I have no reason to be enthusiastic about my job. I work for a Scrooge.” Well the Bible says, “Pay no man evil for evil.” The Christian should do what’s right regardless of what their employer does. Be faithful to obey God’s Word in the job you have, and the Lord may get you another job or He may move on old Scrooge’s heart and get old Scrooge to give you a raise or a promotion and improve your working conditions. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the way to have this kind of attitude is to think of you as working *for the Lord*, not that employer. Though you may not be able to change your circumstances, you can change your attitude to those circumstances. God will honor you and God will bless you for it.

Furthermore, we need to see here an argument from the greater to the lesser. Some of you may work in poor working conditions. You get little or no raise in pay. You are shown very little appreciation for your work. You are required to work long or difficult hours. But no one has it as

bad as a slave. You are at least free when you go home. You don't have to work as many hours as a slave typically did. If Paul says that a Christian *slave* is work in this way, how much more should a free Christian employee work in this way! The best way to be a witness on the job is to do a good day's work.

So do you work obediently, conscientiously, honestly, and enthusiastically? In working with this kind of attitude and competence, we will be "doing to the will of God from the heart" (v.6b). "Heart" is actually *psuche*, the word for "soul." This is God's will for your life, and to do any less than that is to be disobedient to the will of God.

So we have talked about the responsibilities of a Christian worker. Now let's look at the other side of the relationship and see:

II. THE REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPLOYERS

Among those to whom this letter was addressed there were probably not many "slave owners." Cf. I Cor. 1:26-28. Yet, there were some. To the masters, therefore, a word must also be addressed. And there may be some business owners or bosses listening to me. I have a staff that I manage. If you are a Christian, then you have specific responsibilities toward those who work for you. And keep in mind that your witness for Christ is at stake. It is unfortunate when an employee says, "My boss is supposed to be a Christian, but you'd never know it!"

So what should you do as a Christian employer?

A. Work on Behalf of Your Employees – In v.9 Paul says, "And you, masters, do the same things to them..." These Christian slave masters were to treat their slaves with the same Christian principles and consideration that the slaves were to show to the masters. If you expect them to be honest toward you, be honest in your dealings with them. If they are to work hard, show them that you can work hard, not just for yourself, but also on their behalf. So, in effect Paul is saying to the masters: "Promote the welfare of your servants as you expect them to promote yours. The outward actions required may be very different, but there is the same need to act towards servants "as to the Lord", as doing "the will of God", as showing "good will". So treat them the way you want them to treat you. Dear Christian employer, if you want the loyalty of your employees, be considerate of *their* needs.

So what are some things you should do for your employees? Pay them on time, as stated in Dt. 24:14-15. Give them pay raises when you can, at least equal to inflation. If they are helping your company to grow and prosper, let them share in the fruits of their labor. Be considerate of their working conditions. If loyalty and fairness are required for servants, such virtues are required of masters in a greater measure, since masters and employers are in a position of greater privilege and authority.

B. Don't Rely on Negative Motivation – Paul says in the middle of v.9, "giving up threatening..." In other words, "Let your approach be positive, not negative." "Threatening" (*apeile*) has the definite article, referring to the well-known habit of masters threatening their slaves with the whip, or some other form a physical punishment.¹ *Threatening* came very easily to the lips of the master of slaves in the ancient world, and the slave could not answer back. Masters had the legal authority to impose whatever harsh discipline they wanted.

¹ See Acts 4:17, where this word is combined with the verb form, literally, "let us threaten them with threats." In Acts 5:40 they carried out their threat, and had the apostles beaten.

Now let's apply this to us today. What kind of language do you use toward those who work for you? Do you talk down to them? Do you treat them with disrespect? Are you harsh? Are you abusive in the way you speak to them? Do you threaten them, saying you are going to fire them, when you really have no intention to? False promises or threatenings ought never to be engaged in by Christian employers.

Instead of motivation by threatening, use positive motivation. When an employee is doing a good job, commend them. Give them other forms of reward that I have talked about.

C. Keep in Mind Your Own Accountability to the Lord – Paul says in the last of v.9, “knowing that your own Master also is in heaven....” Before threatening, the slave stood helpless. He had no means of defending himself, not even, generally speaking. Before Roman law, the master was accountable to no one in the treatment of his slaves. But as a believer the master was accountable to the Lord, and the Christian slave had a real Defender. Hence, the apostle directs the attention of the masters to this fact. So the Christian master is reminded that all that he says or does to his servant must be said or done remembering that he has a Lord also. If you are over others, you have to always keep in mind somebody is over you. Christian masters are accountable to God for their treatment of their servants. Both masters and slaves bow alike before one Master. Likewise, employers are accountable to God for the way they treat their employees.

D. Don't Think that You're Any Better Before God – Paul also says in the last of v.9, “and there is no partiality with Him.” At least five times we are told that there is no partiality with God (Lev. 19:15; Mal. 2:9; Acts 10:34; Col. 3:25; James 2:1). Essentially, Paul points out that both servant and master stand ultimately on the same level. There are no big shots and little shots with God. We are all on equal basis with God. In God's eyes, the man who drives an old, small car is just as valuable as the man who drives the new Cadillac. Thus, our rank on earth will not influence God at the Day of Judgment. He will condemn the inconsiderate and unkind master as severely as He will the disloyal servant. So there is no room for pride in the heart of a Christian employer.

So we have discussed the responsibilities of Christian employees, and the requirements of Christian employers. Now let us consider:

III. THE REWARD FOR SERVICE

Paul says in v.8, “knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.” The participle “knowing” has a causal force, “Because you know....” Even if the earthly masters take no note of their faithful service, God does, and He will reward accordingly. The word translated receive (*komidzo*) here refers to a just reward or payment (Mt. 25:27) that is received, whether good (Heb. 10:35; 1 Pet. 1:9, 5:4) or bad (2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:25; 2 Pet. 2:13). The Christian who obeys those in authority over him has the assurance that God keeps an accurate record of *all* faithful service, and not just Christian service, and that no act of service done as unto Him will go unrewarded. If your earthly employer does not adequately reward your hard work, then God promises to reward labor done, especially if you have followed the guidelines found in my text. Here's a new angle to the whole concept of the Judgment Seat of Christ. 2 Cor. 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Here is an indication to us that even what we do in our daily work, if we do it as unto the Lord, there is going to be a reward for it. If my employer does not appreciate my sincerity and

faithfulness, I know that God does. So Paul reminds them that everything is witnessed by the Lord in heaven, nothing well done is ever done in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). There may be no thanks on earth. A man may reap only criticism and misunderstanding. However ungrateful your boss down here may be, God will not allow your faithfulness to go unrecognized and unrewarded. So he can know that there is an unfailing reward for faithful service (cf. Lk. 6:35; I Pet. 1:7; Rev. 22:12). In that day even common but faithful slave may hear the Lord Jesus Christ say: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:23). Or as the song says, “There’s but one life on this earth; it will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

What happens when you feel like you are not being rewarded well enough by your employer? Most people will just half-way do their job. But here we see here that the Lord will reward us even if our earthly boss does not. Knowing and believing this truth can transform how you work on the job. May it be so with each of us.

Sources: Dr. Rick E. Ferguson (notes from his sermon on this text, 1995); Francis Foulkes, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); A. Leonard Griffith, *Ephesians: A Positive Affirmation* (Waco: Word Books, 1975); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Lehman Strauss, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957); Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 9/20/92); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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