

Working for the Gospel's Sake *Wisdom for the Workplace*

Texts: *Ephesians 6:5-9; Col 3:22-25; Titus 2:9-10*

Ephesians 6:5-9 “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 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.” (ESV)

Colossians 3:22-25 “Bondservants, 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. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.” (ESV)

Titus 2:9-10 “Bondservants 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.” (ESV)

Introduction:

- We are concluding a major section in the book of Ephesians where Paul tells us how we are to respond to the amazing purpose and plan that God is accomplishing through the amazing peace that Christ established between God and mankind through His obedient life and substitutionary death.
- We have noted that God intends for the people who have received and are now enjoying this amazing peace to be the first fruit of what this peace will one day look like on earth when the Messiah rules and reigns in righteousness, justice, and equity.
- The people who have received this peace and have been given this mission are the church – and they are to display and promote this peace to those in the surrounding culture and who are in desperate need of receiving that peace with God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- And the primary way they are called to do this is by living distinctively on account of the enlightenment (information and instruction) and enablement (power and capacity) that the Holy Spirit has given them.
- The first and primary arena where peace should be prominently displayed is in the relational context of the lives of these believers – namely the shalom that should exist between a husband and wife, between parents and their children, and now between bondservants and their earthly masters.
- All these relationships were components of a “household” in the world of Paul’s day – Christian households were to be distinctly different than the rest of the households in Ephesus – and the difference was the peace/shalom that should mark them in all of these relationships.
- When Christian households operated in this way – those watching would have two questions:
 1. Where did you learn how to do that? The answer is an enlightenment that God gave them through the Spirit and that He wrote down for us in these paragraphs.
 2. How are you actually able to do and maintain that? The answer is through an empowerment that comes from the Spirit who fills us (5:18) with the qualities that belong to God (the fullness of God mentioned in 3:19 and the fullness of Christ mentioned in 4:13)
- So, what does that actually look like in the work and service we are to render to those God has placed above us? What does it look like when we serve and lead those God has placed under our authority for now in this life?
- *Our passage gives us “wisdom” from God regarding how we are to live and function in our God-appointed stations, occupations, vocations in ways that glorify God and advance His purposes and priorities through our work.*
- *In other words – how are we to work for the Gospel’s sake? This passage answers that question by pointing us to four important responses that must be true in our hearts and lives:*

I. We must acknowledge the fallen world in which we live and accept the calling and place God has granted us in that World. (6:5,9)

A. *The Reality Scripture Addresses – “Bondservants”*

- The term Paul uses is a jarring term – it is the term for “slave.”

- As uncomfortable and offensive as the concept of slavery is to us (and rightly so), it was a societal reality in the world of Paul's day.
- More than 2/3 of the population of the Roman Empire in Paul's day were slaves – some 60 million people in the empire were slaves.
- Roman society was run by and functioned on the work that was done by slaves, bondservants, and freedmen. Almost every industry from agriculture, business, education, medicine, government administration, and the production of goods and services depended heavily on the work of Roman slaves. All Roman households of any rank or size were run by slaves. The emperor and civic leaders throughout the empire entrusted the running of their households, their business interest, the training and education of their children, and even the administration of the affairs of state to trusted, loyal slaves.
- Not only did Roman citizens depend on their slaves, a some of them had themselves been slaves before becoming citizens.
- So, slavery was the common lot and station of a great many people in the Roman Empire – and it certainly would have been the lot and station of many believers in churches like Ephesus. We know this because there are numbers of places in the NT where slaves are mentioned by name (Onesimus/Philemon; Tertius and Quartus were standard names for certain positions held by slaves in a Roman household / Rom 16:22-23). Additionally, Paul and Peter both give encouragement and instruction to Christian slaves.
- But how are we to feel and respond to this given the sad history of slavery in the Western World in the 17th and 18th century?

B. *The Context and Distinctives of Slavery in New Testament Times*

- Slavery in the Roman Empire of Paul's day had significant differences from the slavery we are more familiar with that occurred in our more recent history as a nation and in the Western world in the 17th-18th century.
 - While certainly not condoned or defended in the Scripture, and though certainly abuses were done by cruel masters, slavery in the Roman Empire was often entered into voluntarily because it had certain distinctions and perceived benefits that would cause a person to become a bondservant to a particular master.
1. Racial/Ethnic factors did not play a role in the Roman system of slavery. While some slaves were captured in war and forced into slavery, many people became slaves for other reasons. Some were foundlings who had

- been abandoned as children and left to die and had been taken into a Roman household. Others had come into slavery voluntarily to eradicate debt, to seek stable provision, protection, and housing, or to pursue opportunities such as education or opportunity afforded by certain positions or responsibilities common in a larger Roman household.
2. Many slaves could expect to become free person after a period of time – most before the age of 30. Some slaves received modest wages or received gifts for exceptional service that could be used to purchase their freedom. Some entered slavery for an agreed upon period of time to pay off debt after which they were released from slavery.
 3. Many slaves worked in highly specialized and respected position with great responsibility – as doctors, teachers, administrators of the household business, managers over others, tutors who were charged with the training and education of the sons of the *PaterFamilias*, and consequently some slaves become trusted counselors who held great weight and sway in the affairs of their master. Some became philosophers and educators who started schools and training centers – Epictetus as an example.
 4. Many became slaves to avail themselves of specialized training that would make them more valuable once they obtained their freedom.
 5. Many found slavery to be the pathway to obtain the coveted full Roman citizenship that was available to any slave who had been freed by a Roman Citizen.

C. *The Biblical Response to Slavery*

1. While the practice of slavery was never God's intent, Scripture reports accurately that slavery is not a new concept – slavery was an unfortunate, deplorable condition in a fallen world marred and ruined by sin.
2. Scripture never condones slavery – just as Scripture does not condone divorce, or the multiple wives of the patriarchs or the kings of Israel. Yet those sad realities did exist even among God's people. And during the time of the OT, God regulated it (Ex 21:1-11, 32; Lev 25:39-55; DT 15:12-18).
3. Old Testament Scripture regulates it – there are passages in the Scripture where God gives particular instruction to His people in the OT designed to regulate and protect the life, the property, and the well-being of those who were bondservants or slaves among His people.

4. NT Scripture abhors the violent, non-voluntary enslavement of any image bearer by another – 1 Timothy 1:10.

D. ***Paul's Particular Perspective***

1. Paul never condones or justifies slavery in the NT
2. Paul never bases his instruction to Christian slaves on the grounds of “ownership” – that someone other than Christ owned them.
3. Paul reports God’s abhorrence toward those who capture and sell people into slavery (1 Tim 1:10)
4. Did his best to mitigate it by instructing masters to treat their slaves with honor and respect. He himself regarded Christian slaves as his equals and references them as such in his writings (Onesimus, Tertius, and Quartus).
5. He instructs a Christian master, Philemon, to no longer consider Onesimus as his slave but as his brother in Christ.
6. With the clear statement that God abhors those who buy and sell slaves coupled with Paul’s instruction to Philemon to no longer hold his former slave in that role but to consider him a brother in Christ –the NT clearly prohibits any forced or non-voluntary indenture of persons such as was practiced in the 17th-18th century or that goes on today in the world.
7. Finally, Paul tells Christians not to sell themselves into voluntary slavery (1 Cor 7:23) because they belong to God.

E. ***Our Approach to Slavery in Our Day***

1. We must recognize the major differences in nature and context of the slavery described in the Bible and that form of slavery that took place in the Western World.
2. We must repudiate any form of slavery in our day and age based on the full revelation of God as wicked and abhorrent to God.
3. We must repent if we have promoted, defended, or participated in such slavery.

F. ***The Challenge from Paul***

- What may surprise you is the instruction that God gives to Christian slaves living in the Roman Empire – they are not told to revolt! They are not told to rise up against their masters – even harsh masters.
- Here is what they are told in inspired instruction from God:
1 Corinthians 7:20-24 “Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a

bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.” (ESV)

- Servants and Masters – both were to strive to do the will of God in their appointed stations because they both were bondservants/slaves of God!
- Each of us who is employed is either someone’s servant (employee) or someone’s master (supervisor).
- And the principles that God gave to servant’s and masters living under much harsher conditions than ours should apply even more to us!

II. We must embrace God’s Purpose for Us. (1 Peter 2:11-15, Titus 2:9-10)

- What is God’s purpose? *That we would use our place (as servants or masters) to advance the Gospel!*
- How? 2 ways revealed in two passages that address slaves/servants:

A. *By Maintaining Excellent Behavior at All Times (1 Peter 2:11-15)*

1 Peter 2:11-15 “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.” (ESV)

- By keeping our behavior excellent among the Gentiles so they will glorify God in the day of visitation because of our good deeds!

B. *Adorning the Doctrine of God in All Things (Titus 2:9-10)*

Titus 2:9-10 “Bondservants 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.” (ESV)

- How will we ever do that?

III. We must adopt God's Practices (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:23-25)

- In this text and in its parallel passage, God has given "wisdom" for servants and for masters that will help them manifest excellent behavior at all times and adorn the gospel of God in all things!

A. *Servants – Render Christ-like Obedience to Your Earthly Masters.*

- Serve God by obeying your earthly masters (lords/kyrios) in all things they ask you to do that do not violate something God has commanded or desired of you in Scripture.
- No one would be shocked to hear Paul tell slaves/bondservants to obey their masters. Everyone expected slaves to obey. What was shocking was how they were to render this obedience: (*obey in this way*)
 1. By obeying and working **Respectfully** (v 5)
with fear and trembling
 - Work with a proper attitude toward those in authority, even those who are harsh or twisted (1 Peter 2:18)
 - obey with deep respect and appropriate reverence
 - Psalm 2:11 – this is how you serve YHWH.
 - Phil 2:12 – this is how you work out your salvation
 2. By obeying and working **Wholeheartedly** (v. 5)
with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,
 - With proper approach toward your work
 - With a single mind – and a whole heart! Not motivated by greed, guile, deceit, or resentment.
 - Don't be half-hearted about your work – work with your full heart! Don't pretend to labor and merely loiter.
 - Don't be content to do "just enough" to get by – work hard and give it your full attention and energy!
 - And serve sincerely – genuinely. Do not pretend to work hard. Do not pretend to be loyal. Work hard. Be loyal.
 - Serve and obey your earthly master as you would serve and obey Christ – because, actually that is the service and obedience Christ desires of you.

- As David served the Lord – “I know, Lord, that you are the one who tests hearts and you love righteousness. In simplicity of heart I have show zeal for all these things! (1 Chron 29:13).
3. By obeying and working ***Conscientiously*** (v. 6)
not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ,
 - With proper attention to your task
 - Not rendering service for the “eye” of the master - Not just working when someone is seeing or to impress the master to gain some advantage or favor in his sight
 - Not just working when he is watching or doing only what you know he will see or inspect
 - Working by a completely different standard – working to impress a higher master – God – Who always sees!
 - This is why you must do more than just give good outward service – it must come from a from a proper spirit!
 4. By obeying and working ***Cheerfully/Willingly*** and not grudgingly (v 6). *doing the will of God from the heart*
 - With a proper spirit in the workplace – willingly! Not something your master has to constantly force out of you.
 - As you are to serve the Lord – with all your heart and with all your soul (Dt. 10:12).
 5. Marked by goodwill and not resentment toward your master.
 - Do you work with the good of your master in mind regardless of how he has treated you.
 - There would be many reasons that could provide grounds for a servant to harbor ill-will or resentment toward his master – and use that as an excuse to do harm to his master through his work.
 - What would distinguish a Christian servant was his ability to serve such a master with good will and ongoing loyalty in spite of the slights, the unfairness, or even the harsh treatment received from that same master.
 6. For this reason – you know something from God!

- And you are to reckon or factor this information into your service to your earthly master.
- What you know is this – God sees and knows the good you do in your service to your earthly master ... and He will reward you with good!

B. *Masters – Lead with Christ-like Authority. (6:9)*

Use your authority and position to serve them as you would have them serve you!

1. ***Respectfully*** – masters, do the same things to them
 - What things? You rule them with the same heart and attitude that God expects of them when they serve you!
 - Respect them because they are your brothers in Christ!
 - Treat them with sincerity and with good-will
2. ***Reasonably*** – giving up abusive threatening
 - Don't be harsh with them, mistreat them, manipulate them, or threaten them to get them to do your will.
 - Treat them as your Master in Heaven treats you – consider them as fellow servants of Jesus Christ!
3. For this reason – there is no partiality with God (v 9)
 - You are also a servant
 - Your Master will show no partiality when you stand next to your earthly servant over whom you have been granted temporary authority

Now – why would God instruct people to live like this instead of trying to find a way to get as much for themselves as possible?

IV. We must labor for God's Priorities. (1 Peter 2:11-25)

Why should we work hard to adorn the gospel with excellent behavior?

- That they will glorify God – by seeing our good deeds (1 Peter 2:12)
- That they will turn to the Shepherd and let him become the overseer of their souls (1 Peter 2:25)

What on earth would motivate a man to live like this? Answer – nothing on earth but rather something he will receive from Heaven – a coming reward!

How on earth is a servant able to render such service willingly, consistently, and joyfully? By a power not native to himself – by a grace-enablement from the Holy Spirit!

V. We must Rest in God’s Promises

A. *This finds favor with God! (1 Peter 2:20-21)*

“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. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” (ESV)

B. *He will reward abundantly (Eph 6:8; Col 3:24)*

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

Col 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

1. In this life
2. In the life to come

Mark 10:28-30 “Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.” (NASB95)

C. *He will judge impartially (Col 3:25)*

But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

Conclusion:

- This “wisdom” doesn’t seem very wise in the eyes of the world. This doesn’t seem to be the way to get ahead on the job!
- In fact, Peter seems to indicate that if you actually take this seriously and attempt to be this kind of an employee or this kind of an employer – there will be times when you will actually suffer for it!
- BUT – this is definitely the way to accomplish God’s business and advance His purposes. It is precisely when you stand out as this kind of a kind, honest, honorable, diligent, faithful worker that the gospel is adorned by your life.
- What if your supervisor had a worker that was impeccably honest, unfailingly diligent and faithful to carry out his wishes – and was kind and gracious and unselfishly zealous for the well-being of the supervisor himself?
- And what if this worker was never self-seeking or self-promoting or trying to do things to get noticed or to get ahead?
- And what if that worker were unashamedly Christian in his life and testimony -- what do you think the impact long term of that worker’s life and testimony long term over the years might be on that supervisor in bringing him to Christ through the gospel?
- ***And what if that worker were you? How do you think his Heavenly Master would reward him in this life as well as in the one to come?***
- What if the workers on your shift had a supervisor who was so unusually kind and considerate and fair and honest with them? What if they had someone who genuinely cared for them and their interests and their families?
- What if this supervisor consistently said gracious words to them rather than hard words? What if he was consistently gracious in his discipline of them rather than impatient and harsh?
- What if this supervisor actually cared for them and visited them when they were sick and remembered them when they were sorrowing and rejoiced with them when they were joyful at the birth of a baby or the accomplishment of a son?
- What if this supervisor unselfishly invested himself in their lives way beyond the call of duty? What would the impact be on the bottom line of the company?
- What would the impact be on the lives of those workers for the gospel?
- What if, through the gracious and kind servant leadership of this supervisor, his worker embraced the gospel and became a follower of Christ?
- ***And – what if that supervisor were you? And how do you think His master would reward him in this life and in the one to come?***