

Christ in Your Workplace, #1

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Bible Text: Ephesians 6:5-8
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Well, it's our joy to gather again on a Sunday morning as the redeemed people of God, those who have been ransomed from sin by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and as we begin this morning, if you do not know Christ, we invite you to a crucified and risen Savior who gave himself for sinners just like you that you could be redeemed and you can walk out of this room today knowing that your sins are forgiven if you would simply repent and put your faith in Christ, and we invite you to Christ as we begin this morning. And for those of us that are here as the redeemed people of God, we take it as a privilege and a gift from God to turn to his word to see how he would instruct us today and we come to the book of Ephesians 6 and I invite you to turn to Ephesians 6 as the Apostle Paul gives us another practical outworking of the nature of salvation and, you know, in our day and age, it's just very important for us to recognize something very fundamental and essential about the nature of Christian salvation. It is so common and perhaps you've grown up in this environment as I somewhat did as well, to think that you pray a prayer to be saved and God saves you and says, "I'll take you to heaven and not send you to hell and then however else you want to live your life for the rest of your time on earth doesn't really matter, you know, and you'll still in end up in heaven in the end." Well, that's not the nature of salvation at all. You see, when Christ gave himself on the cross to save sinners, he wasn't simply flipping a switch on the direction that you would go when you die, Jesus Christ died to make his own; that you would belong to him and that you would serve him on earth all of the days of your life and that you would increasingly be conformed to be like him in the life that he has given to you, and that has practical ramifications for our day-to-day lives. Every aspect of your life is affected and influenced by the fact that you belong to Christ. That seems to be getting lost more and more in our superficial evangelical age.

But you can see how salvation is meant to permeate like yeast that grows through a whole leaven of lump, it is meant to influence and impact every aspect of your life; you can see that by the passages of Scripture that we have been studying. Paul, having gone through a long praise to God and an explanation of Christian salvation, Paul having said that God raised us from spiritual death and bestowed grace upon us, what does he do after he has laid all of that out in the first three chapters and also into chapters 4 and 5? Well, if you went by what modern teachers tell us today you'd think that he was ready to close and say amen but that's not what he does at all, is it? What Paul does is he says, "Now that I have laid out the nature of salvation and called you to walk in a manner worthy of your

salvation," what does he do at the end of chapter 5? He starts talking about marriage, the most intimate personal human relationship that there ever could be. He speaks to wives and husbands and says, "This is how salvation is to play out in your lives." He moves on and he speaks to children and he says, "Children, you honor your father and mother. Obey your parents because in the Lord this is what is right." Then he addresses parents and says, "Parents, here's how you are to raise your children, as Christians." My point being, it's a major broad point for you to see, very crucial, especially if you're new to the Bible, very crucial to understand that Paul takes the Apostle Paul, the appointed representative by the Lord Jesus himself, he takes salvation and then he runs it through every area, the most intimate areas of our lives, showing us that salvation has impact on the daily way that you live. Moment by moment there is nothing that escapes from the permeating influence of Scripture, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit on your lives.

Now, think with me for just a little bit longer, probably another 50 minutes longer but at this point here I just want you to think with me, think about it this way: as we go through our lives, one of the things that we are most given to especially as adults is what it is that we do, how we support ourselves, the living that we make, our employment and how we respond to the workplace environment. Well, if what we said earlier is true that Christianity is designed, Christ intends to permeate your life to sanctify every aspect of your being that it would be lived to his glory, then you would expect to find that in Scripture there is instruction about how this works out in the workplace and that's exactly what we find. What I want you to see at this point in what we're saying here is to realize that the Lordship of Jesus Christ over those that he has redeemed is comprehensive. It is meant to go everywhere in your life. There is not a moment that you live and a moment that you are awake as a conscious sentient being that is not directly influenced by the fact that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and from that general principle, we go and apply it in particular to this passage that we're going to see here this morning, Ephesians 6:5-8. Let me read it for you just set it in your mind here today. Ephesians 6:5-8. Paul says,

5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

You see, when you read Scripture, you see that the Bible is a very wise book which is what you would expect since it comes from an infinitely wise and omniscient God, and as a wise God, he has given us a book that helps us walk through life and gives us direction for every aspect of life that we could possibly encounter. God's word is sufficient for you to live a godly life and you need no other help; you need no other revelation from God. You don't need God to speak to you in your private prayer closet. You don't need a word from God that comes through a preacher saying, "God spoke to me and told me what to tell you." All of that stuff is bogus. It's false. It's a misdirection from Satan himself to make us think that way and to direct us away from the pure sufficiency of Scripture.

Now, with that in mind, as we come here, we find Paul has laid out what Christ should be to you in your workplace. He gives us the instruction that we need to put Christ at the center of how we make our living and we should understand that our employment comes under the Lordship of Christ whether you're a man in ministry or whether you're a man who is a blue-collar worker; whether you're a pastor or whether you're a white-collar executive doing something. It's all the same in the sense that every one of us lives out our employment to the glory of Christ under the Lordship of Christ. So we see a comprehensive instruction given to us here in God's word today.

Now, what I've got for you today is a message with about 45 minutes of introduction and five minutes of sermon, so just so you know, this message today is a little bit different than what you are accustomed to, and I'm doing it for this reason: Paul is addressing this situation that existed in the first century when he wrote and he speaks to slaves in this passage and slavery, let's start with a definition here, slavery is a social institution in which one man owns another as property so that that slave is absolutely subject to his master's will. That's what slavery is. That's what it means to be a slave. Another man owns you and your will is completely subordinated to his. Scripture talks about us as slaves of Christ, as those who are completely subordinated to the authority of Christ and that his will is law in our lives. We're not our own. We've been bought with a price. Well, that's a picture of a reality that existed in daily life and as we talk in terms of slavery, there's a real problem for us in America that I want to address and I need to spend a lot of time dispelling some misdirected thinking that might keep you from receiving the full impact of this passage so I want to give you some direction and some instruction that will help you. When we come to this passage, Ephesians 6:5-8 and we read about slaves and their service and being obedient to your masters and all of that, here's the problem for you and me here in the 21st century in America: we are perhaps, even without thinking about it, we are subject to the very real possibility of interpreting this passage, of receiving this passage through the prism of our national experience with slavery in America. When we hear slavery, we think about the 17th and the 18th century, the 19th century, the Civil War and all of those things. Whatever your understanding is of that, you think about a race of people that was subjugated and we think about it in terms of our own political experience and if that's how you approach this passage and try to understand it in light of that, that would be an interpretive fundamental mistake of the highest order. That is not what Paul is talking about here.

Now, I understand that that may be the only way that you know to think about slavery and so I need to help you with some background information that will kind of clear the slate, give us the right frame of mind, the right understanding and right perspective, so that we can understand what Paul is saying here properly. Beloved, thoughts about American slavery as you approach this passage, will hinder and obstruct your understanding of this text. This is not a text directed to the 19th century institution of slavery. One authority says this and I'm going to quote a number of sources here today, one authority says this and I quote, "Knowledge of slavery as practiced in the 17th to 19th centuries has hindered more than advanced an understanding of social economic life in the first century. The slavery mentioned in the New Testament must be defined strictly in terms of the profoundly different legal and social context of the first century." You see,

if we come with our presuppositions thinking that the Bible is all about us and it is centered in our experience, well, we're going to really miss the boat. You see, our job is not to bring the Bible into the 18th and 19th century and say what does it mean from that context, rather we are to step back into the first century and understand it from that perspective. That's part of proper interpretation of Scripture.

Now, here's why that's so important. If you think about slavery and if you think about it as being an abuse of black people in the time, it's not helpful at all to understanding what's going on here in Ephesians 6. A different source says this about slavery in the context of New Testament times. Listen to me carefully and I quote, "The economic, social and legal status of slaves in antiquity was far better than the status of African slaves in the southern states of the United States. In antiquity, slaves were by no means deprived of all legal rights, rather they retained a number of privileges such as the right to marry and certain property rights." Okay, so here's the thing, let's forget about American slavery as we go to this so that we can understand the Bible on its own terms. That's really the point here. We want to understand Scripture as it was given in its original context and in order to do that, we need to understand some things about slavery in the original setting because our goal is to understand the passage in its original context.

Here's another reason why that's so important: especially today in all of our racially charged politics that we are suffering through in this period in our nation's lives, a common question designed to mitigate, marginalize and minimize Christianity is to ask a question like this, "Why does the Bible not condemn slavery? If it's God's word and it's righteous, why doesn't it speak to the institution of slavery and condemn it?" And the fact that the Bible doesn't do that suddenly seems to place it on the margins of what's acceptable thought in today's society. Well, we reject all of that. The Bible is central to proper thinking. There is no right thinking apart from Scripture and so we want to defend and understand the Scriptures. We're going to deal with that question a little more in a couple of weeks, but here's the thing, when someone says, "Why does the Bible not condemn slavery?" making an accusation in spirit and in tone against Scripture trying to impugn the righteousness of Scripture from a 21st-century perspective, we reject that. The Bible did not exist, it was not written, to answer modern social questions that would come up 1800 or 1900 years later. The whole premise of the question is false and wrong and misdirected. And listen, there are just so many fundamental things here that you just need to really grasp: understand who Paul was and what he was doing when he wrote the letter to Ephesians. This is central to our faith, the very issue that we're talking about here, believe it or not. What was Paul doing? Who was Paul? Paul was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was sent by Christ in order to build up the church which is the people for whom Christ died. Paul is not writing as a social theorist trying to satisfy all of the political ambitions of everyone who would ever live. He had a targeted purpose, a targeted audience from a targeted Master of his own. Jesus established Paul to be an instrument of blessing and revelation to the Christian church and so what Paul is doing here as he writes in Ephesians is he is instructing Christians about their obedience to Christ, not writing to the world about a utopian version of how men should live together in harmony on earth. So Paul's purpose was to instruct Christians in obedience to Christ and it's from that perspective within the first century context that he writes.

I think about these things maybe more than I should, but I just get really irked. I get really upset when I see people from the world who have no love for Christ whatsoever, who have no desire to bend the knee to him, trying to appropriate the Bible to their own use and make the Bible say what they want it to mean or to criticize the Bible because it doesn't say what they want it to be. It's not their book. If you don't belong to Christ, you have no realm in which to criticize Scripture and so we set aside the political wrangling of today, the false accusations that are made against Scripture and the criticisms that are leveled because it doesn't say what modern liberal politicians want it to say, rather beloved, what you and I do here today every Sunday and Tuesday at Truth Community Church, we come as learners; we come as disciples; we come as slaves of Christ and say, "What would Scripture say? I want to be instructed." You see, this book sits over us. We don't stand over this book in judgment of us, the Bible stands in judgment of us. We don't stand in judgment of Scripture, Scripture stands in judgment of us and so we come to learn from it and to subject ourselves to it and to be instructed and led by God as he would teach us as those who belong to Christ. So I hope that's all clear. Paul was instructing Christians here about their obedience to Christ, not outlining a utopian human social order for all and when we come with that term, then we can say, "Okay, we've got our mindset going in the right direction."

Now, with that said, what was Paul addressing when he wrote these words to slaves? What was slavery like in the first century? That's what I want to address. Sometimes you need to go into more background than in other times so that your understanding can be correct. In other words, what we want to do is we want the best that we can put ourselves in the sandals of a first century Christian who is receiving these words from Paul and to understand what Paul was saying in the context of their lives. How did they understand slavery? What was their experience with it? That's what we want to look at here this morning because it will help us see more clearly the way it applies to us today.

What can we say about slavery? First of all, slavery in the first century? Point 1: slavery was common. Slavery was common. In fact, it was woven into the order of existence in such a way that it was just an assumed part of life. I realize that as you and I stand here today, that's outside our experience. The idea of a man owning another man so that he's a legal thing instead of a legal person is outside of our understanding. I mean, we are born and bred on American freedom, "Live free or die," but we need to set that aside and say, "Okay, that's not the perspective from which people were living in the first century." Slavery was common. Slavery was an assumed part of the culture of the time that no one questioned and so it's not for us to retroactively judge that social order, it's our job to understand it and see what we can draw out of it for our own lives.

Here's what we can say about it being common: up to one third of the population in large cities consisted of slaves. A third of the people that lived in these large cities at the time were slaves and it was not a situation where the slaves were an obviously distinct class or an obviously distinct race. No, it wasn't like that at all. Listen to what one authority says, "In outward appearance, it was usually impossible to distinguish among slaves, freed men and free persons." Listen to me here, "Neither the slave's clothing nor his or her race

revealed a legal or social status. Patterns of religious life, friends or work, did not separate slaves from free people." So you could walk down a Roman Street and pass people by and you would not be able to distinguish who was a slave and who was not. In fact, at one point there was legislation proposed at that time suggesting that there should be clothing or some kind of distinguishing mark so people would know the difference between slaves and free men. The point is this was so blended into society, this was so much the natural course of things that it was just assumed and there was no distinguishing between slaves and those who were free. It was common in a third of the men in the time in those large cities were slaves. That gives you a different perspective on it.

Here's the point for what we should see today and what helps us apply it properly: when Paul wrote this and he wrote to slaves, he was speaking to a situation that crossed all economic and all social boundaries. He was speaking something that was applicable to everyone in the situation. He was speaking to a condition that was embedded in daily life. For us today, what Paul would say would be exactly the same. Although we're not owned by other men, we are here gathered together today in a broad sweep of economic classes. We are gathered together as those who work in different occupations: some blue-collar, some white-collar, some doing manual labor, some doing labor with their minds, some in sales, some in other things. So what Paul was doing here is the same thing that would happen as Scripture comes to us today, it speaks to us across a breadth of human experience. Well, the commonality of slavery, his word came in a similar way. Different social structures but in a similar common way, the word of God came and spoke to a broad cross-section of people. Slavery was common.

Secondly, in a related manner: slavery was diverse. Slavery was diverse and here's what I want to say about that. Under Roman law as I indicated just a moment ago, slaves legally considered were things, not persons, not legal persons. That's a thought that offends our human sensibilities today about human rights and self-expression and self-esteem. Can you imagine today with the self-esteem cult that dominates thinking today for someone to be a slave, considered a legal thing? It's just incomprehensible but that is the mindset that existed. Under law, according to law, they were things that belonged to men rather than being people in themselves. That's the legal status. That's the legal theory but, beloved, in practice, the reality was much different. We know all about that, right? We know what it's like to have a law that says one thing but the practice is completely different. Most of you know what the speed limit sign says, you know what in theory the law is but in practice everybody lives a little bit differently than that, most of you do, anyway, because you've passed me on the road. I know that and I've passed you a time or two also so that's all right. But here's what I want you to see: while a lot of teachers will make a big deal about the thing that slaves were legal things and absolutely subject to their masters and the masters could dispose of them as they wished, that's the legal theory that was at work but the practical outworking of things was much different. Slaves held duties that defied those kinds of stereotypes and, again, we see that our conception of slaves as being fieldworkers or cooks or house servants and things like that that come from stereotypes of our American experience, that doesn't transfer over to what the situation was in the first century. Listen to what one source says, "Slaves served not only as cooks, cleaners and

personal attendants, but also as tutors of persons of all ages, physicians, nurses, close companions, and managers of the household. They were managers of estates, shops, and ships, as well as salesman and contracting agents. They were used not only in street paving and sewer cleaning but also as administrators of funds and personnel and as executives with decision making powers." You hear that and you say, "Well, wow, that means that they were at all points of society. This sounds a lot like a cross-section of American workers that would be gathered together today." And you see, that's precisely the point. That is precisely the point. I'm going into such depth at this to get your mind around the fact, to help you get your mind around the fact that Paul is addressing something that had a comprehensive nature and flavor to it. Rather than thinking about slaves as somebody who was completely subjugated in marginal, menial tasks as we tend to think about slavery, we need to see that that wasn't the case. Paul was speaking to a broad cross-section of people who would have been in the church at every level of human experience and human responsibility when he wrote these things.

So in daily life, there was a continuum from menial to executive services and powers and duties that slaves served. So this wasn't a microcosm of isolation, Paul was speaking to something that spoke broadly to the people in the church at that time. Everyone would have been influenced and affected by that and so if we just think about slaves as abused servants or overworked field hands, we'll really miss the point and we don't want to treat God's word that way. Roman slavery in terms of what slaves did was every bit as diverse as American employment is today. Slavery was common and it was diverse. Today, we have common employment, we have a diversity of employment that is represented here in our auditorium amongst our people and so we realize, here's the thing, we realize that Scripture isn't marginalized as we talk about it, as it talks about slaves, it's something that addresses directly the situation in which we live today. We just have a different legal status as we look at it.

Now, the third point is that slavery was moderate. Slavery was moderate and this is perhaps the most important thing for those of you who perhaps have read some commentaries in the years gone by on Ephesians that you would want to know and see. Many commentators, following material, it's just obvious, following material written by William Barclay, suggests that slavery was shockingly abusive and you can read this approach about slaves getting their teeth knocked out and in being crucified for marginal offenses and things like that, you can read this in multiple commentaries as you're studying but do you know what? They're all quoting the same single source when they do that. It's not that there is a multiplied witness to these things, it's all coming from one guy whose material may or may not have been balanced and you need to understand that that depressingly violent view of slavery is not what the general reality was that marked the times in which Paul wrote. Were their cruel masters? Sure. Do we have bad bosses here today? I won't ask for a show of hands. Some of you work for people that are in this room. That would not be a good idea on my part pastorally. Do we have bad bosses today? Yes. Do we have cruel bosses? Well, maybe, I don't know. The opportunity for cruelty, physical cruelty in today's work environment in our Western culture has really been mitigated by unions and labor laws and things like that that don't give them the same liberty that they had back in the first century. But here's the point: those abuses that

people so often talk about in their writings, that was from a prior age. It was dying out when Paul wrote. The past excesses of slavery had changed as Paul is writing here in the first century.

Listen to what one authority says about this and I quote these things and I have them well documented in my notes. If you're ever interested in this, I can show you exactly my sources. I want you to know I'm not making this up. This is not me trying to make a stand, this is a scholarly consensus across multiple authorities. One source said this, "One must be exceedingly careful not to assign the barbaric treatment of slaves by the Romans in the pre-Christian centuries to the early Christian era. Sweeping humanitarian changes had been introduced into the Roman world by the first century which led to a radically improved treatment of slaves." And beloved, the way slavery was practiced also indicates it's more moderate quality than the abusive picture that some men have painted for us in the past. Listen to what another source says and think about it, think about whether somebody would do what I'm about to describe if slavery was a violent abusive system that was horribly bad for the slaves themselves. Listen to this as I quote, "Large numbers of people sold themselves into slavery for various reasons, above all, to enter a life that was easier and more secure than existence as a poor freeborn person, to obtain special jobs or to climb socially. Many non-Romans sold themselves to Roman citizens with the justified expectation carefully regulated by Roman law, of becoming Roman citizens themselves when freed. The money that one received from such a self sale usually became the beginning of the personal funds that would later be used to enter freedom under more favorable circumstances." Now, picture this: there's a special class and special privileges that belong to Roman citizens and you know that and yet you're a foreigner; you don't have opportunity, those privileges don't belong to you; you're at the front end of life and you want to make a better way for yourself. Well, what the practice was is that people would come to Roman citizens and sell themselves into slavery, deliberately enter into it for a period of time so that they would have a financial benefit and then later on they would become a Roman citizen and have the rights and privileges that pertain to citizenship that they otherwise would have been outside of. Slavery for people like that, and this was very common, slavery was a means of personal advancement to them, not a matter of being subjugated against their will. They voluntarily entered into it.

Others found economic security in slavery and, again, as Americans we need to hear this and think through this and not judge everything simply by our own personal political experience as if being an American exhausted everything that somebody needed to know about social order. The arrogance of Americans is really stunning when you travel about and see things as others see them. I've been rebuked by friends overseas in Asia on more than one occasion. I'm a better man for it as I stand here today. To us the idea of slavery, no, no, no. Well, not to them. Here's the thing and remember, people in the first century were like us, they had to live lives and they wanted to know where their next meal was going to come from; they wanted to know where they were going to sleep at night. They had to live an existence, they wanted to live life with a measure of security and how did some of them find that security? They found it in slavery. Listen to what another source says, "The living conditions of many slaves were better than those of free men who often

slept in the streets of the city or lived in very cheap rooms. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the slaves lived within the confines of their master's house." Get this, "In times of economic hardship, it was the slave and not the free man who was guaranteed the necessities of life for himself and his family."

So the man in slavery because part of the obligation of the master was to provide for him and it was to the master's economic benefit to make sure his slaves were cared for and able to do their duties that he had hired them for, they had a guaranteed provision under the care of a master that wasn't available to a man who was out on his own living in the streets. He had his so-called freedom which we think is such an important virtue here in America, and it is, I'm not down on America as I say these things, I just want you to think from a different perspective, go back into the first century and give somebody a choice. You could be a slave and live under reasonable conditions and know where your meals were coming and have a warm place to sleep or you could be a free man and not have any indication of where your next meal was going to come from; not have any steady income; and probably be sleeping in the gutter more often than not. Well, what are you going to choose? "I must be free!" People don't think that way and they didn't back then. They thought, "I must eat and I must be secure and I must have a basis for life." So slavery was not a horrible mistake, for them it's what gave them security and stability in life. It was moderate, in other words.

And as you go on, you find that slavery as it was practiced in the first century, it wasn't even usually a permanent condition. One Roman writer said that a worthy slave could expect to receive his freedom in about seven years. Another writer said Roman slavery functioned as a process, rather than a permanent condition, as a temporary phase of life by which an outsider obtained a place in a society. Let me say that again. Listen to me carefully: Roman slavery functioned as a process rather than a permanent condition. It was a temporary phase of life by which an outsider obtained a place in society. Do you know what the comparison is between our current situation, our life and our history in America to first century, the American parallel is not southern slavery in times gone by that we fought a war amongst ourselves over, think about it this way: the American parallel today would be to enlist in the military so that you could receive the economic benefits after your four or six or eight years of service or whatever it might be. You sacrifice your freedom for a time, give yourself under someone else's command, you're not free to come and go as you wish and yet on the other side of it, there are a lot of economic benefits and economic opportunities for those that have served our country that aren't available to those of us who did not. So with all of that said, we just want to think rightly about it and not condemn a past society for a practice that they accepted and benefited from, and not to be intimidated by those who say, "Why doesn't the Bible speak about slavery?" Well, it does but Paul had no reason to condemn an institution at that time that was serving the economic benefit of many and that was producing social order and harmony. So there was no reason for him to condemn that and what was the alternative going to be? There was no alternative even for it. So we need to realize the practical nature of Scripture and not judge it on theoretical grounds that are isolated to our own present limited age.

So, with all of that said, with that background, slavery was common, it was diverse, and it was moderate in its implementation, what did Paul say to those that were in such common employment? Well, you know, it applies to you in your work here today. What Paul does is he calls people in that condition to see Christ in their workplace. Coming full circle back to what we said, that Christ is Lord over all and that we are to live every aspect of life under his seeing, omniscient, caring hand for us, Paul puts Christ right at the center of the workplace. Let me read the passage again, make a couple of observations, and then we'll save the rest for next week. Look at verse 5 with me, Ephesians 6:5, "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free." Now, to say that slaves had a good economic situation is not to say that they were necessarily good workers spontaneously. Paul is writing here to address issues common to the state of humanity, not unique to slavery; that which men in their work find that they are discontent, dissatisfied, lazy, working only when the boss is watching, you all know what that's like either by direct personal experience or by people that you've been with in the workplace. Slavery has changed from then until now, the nature of humanity has not. The same common issues and spiritual issues needed to be addressed in what Paul said.

Now, notice what he does here. This is a fascinating observation that really helps you put the passage in a broad perspective to set us up to see the details next week. Paul calls us, he calls Christians to, as it were, see Christ in your workplace. Be conscious of the presence of the Lord when you are in the midst of your work, your common work, the diverse ways in which all of you earn your living, the generally moderate conditions under which most of you work where you are not threatened with physical abuse in what you do. You go into work and you have a situation that is not unlike what we saw in the first century and so this applies to you and look at what Paul says, he says, "See Christ in your workplace. Contemplate Christ. Going back to things that we've said about marriage and parenting, think vertically before you think horizontally about your workplace." In each verse here, Paul alludes to Christ or the Lord.

Look at verse 5, he says, "Slaves, be obedient to your masters," at the end of verse 5, "as to Christ." Respond to your earthly master; respond to the earthly person who gives direction to your work duties as understanding that they stand in a position that Christ has given to them with authority that Christ has given to them, respond to them and obey them just like you would Christ himself.

Verse 6, he says it four times, you can't miss it, he says, "not by way of eyeservice," not just when people are watching. He says, don't serve that way but you serve like this: serve as a slave of Christ, as though Christ himself work your master in the workplace and that what is being mediated through your human supervisor is that which Christ has for you to do and you respond to that situation in the same way you would respond to Christ himself, as though Christ had given you the commands himself.

Verse 7, "With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men." Looking through the window of the human representative and seeing, "This is what God has for me today. I have the job that God has given me. I have the work that God has assigned to me at this time in my life. This comes from the hand of God, from his providence and therefore I will respond as though I was serving Christ directly and not through a human master." Verse 7, "With good will render service, as to the Lord." Verse 8, "knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free."

Verse 5, Christ. Verse 6, Christ. Verse 7, the Lord. Verse 8, the Lord. There is a Christ-centered perspective that you bring to your workplace and the question for us then is whether that's the way that we think and the way that we understand our work, that as you go into your so-called secular realm of employment, that you're actually entering into a sacred realm sanctified by Christ, directed by Christ, and a realm in which Christ will reward you and honor you in so far as you serve him in what you do. There is not a secular and sacred distinction in that way. Even in your secular employment, you are serving Christ with what you do and that shapes the way that you respond to it. Christ is central to your work. Your boss has God-given authority and what is the take away? What did Paul have for the slaves of his day that applies to us today? God is calling you and even in the home, you know, you wives that are workers at home, in the same way, this is the same theme, God is calling you to heart attitudes that give eternal meaning even to the most mundane tasks. You take your responsibilities that God has assigned to you in his providence and you say, "This is from God. This is what I do. This is what he has given to me and I am to serve in this position as though I were serving Christ himself and if God wants me to make widgets on a factory line, then that's what I'm going to do. This is what I give back to God as my service to him." And it transforms the whole understanding of why you do what you do. It's not purely about the economic benefit. You can overlook the human irritations that come when you say, "This is where God has placed me and if Christ has placed me here, then it sanctifies every aspect and every moment of my day because I'm living it in response to the one who saved me from my sins." You see, beloved, ultimately in your workplace, you're responding to Christ, to structures that he has put in place intending your good, testing your obedience, and for which one day he will reward you as you are faithful to it.

So what does that mean? It means this: that even in the mundane aspects of work you can move beyond a sense of drudgery, you can move beyond a sense of dissatisfaction, and you can find joy and meaning and purpose even in the simplest of things. I just thought of a baptism testimony I heard many years ago at that other place that we used to live at, some place out West, that really kind of summarizes all of this. There was a woman who was baptized one night at Grace Community Church, I don't remember her name, but as she was giving her testimony, she said, "I used to work in a horrible nightclub." She didn't describe anymore and we didn't need to know anymore but it was really, really dark and bad and ugly what she was involved in. Somehow the Lord saved her and I'll never forget what she said in response as one of the marks of the reality of her salvation. Here's this woman who had been used and abused in so many ways, she comes to Christ

and what did she say? I can't be as direct and candid as she was. I'll modify this and sanctify it just a bit. I'll never forget the joy in her face as she said it either. She said, "Now after working in that nightclub before I became a Christian, now I'm a Christian and I clean up after dogs and I have never been so happy." Yes, that's exactly right, that even cleaning up after dogs can be a joyful, sanctified experience when you realize that you are living out the reality of your salvation and that even that mundane, medial, dirty, messy work done under Christ is a source of profound joy. Most of you aren't cleaning up after dogs as a means of your employment, as a means by which you sustain yourself, and yet many of you are dissatisfied and grumbling in the midst of it. Do you realize that God's word today is calling you to a higher standard? Do you realize that God's word is calling you to think completely differently about your work? To see that this is a service to Christ and that you can do that with joy and honor and thanksgiving and satisfaction even if the rest of the world hasn't caught on yet to just how brilliantly gifted you are? Christ in your workplace is part of the outworking of your salvation.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the word of God and we thank you that it transcends cultures and times and different political situations and speaks to all of us in the realm in which we live. Father, those of us that have had any employment over the years can relate to the days where we grumbled in the midst of what we've done, where we felt perhaps we were being treated unfairly or not given all of the opportunity that we deserved or the compensation that was rightfully ours, Lord, we come and bring all of those things to you in a spirit of confession of sin and confess to you that it reflects our worldly-centered thinking rather than a Christ-centered approach that is joyful to serve you in whatever circumstances you place us in. We repent, our Lord. We repent in your presence of our ungodly attitudes and ask you to renew our minds according to the truth. For those of us that have employment, Father, we thank you that you have given us a means to work for our living and to be sustained by the labor of our hands, knowing that it is given by you and that one day we will receive a future reward in heaven from you for the way that we serve you here on earth. Father, we are not marginalized, we're not impoverished, we're not handicapped in the work that we are given. This is a blessing from you, whatever it may be, and we thank you for it, and we ask, Father, for the work of your Holy Spirit deep within our hearts that would give us a contentment whether we're cleaning up after dogs or completing multimillion dollar deals and projects. Whatever the case may be, Father, may our satisfaction come not from the external service but the internal reality that we belong to you and we serve you even in that place of secular employment. We thank you for that. We thank you that our Lord Jesus sanctified labor, sanctified work by his own life when he worked as a carpenter in his own father's shop. You, yourself, worked with your hands, Lord, there is no labor that's beneath us and so we thank you for that. We thank you for all of your grace, all of your word, and we thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus who bought us at the price of his own blood. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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