

Doing Your Job for the Lord

Ephesians 6:5-9

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Howard Hendricks, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, did a lot of flying for speaking engagements, was asked by American Airlines to write critiques about his flight experiences. He wrote about one trip where the flight attendant did a terrific job. The flight had been delayed, there was lots of turbulence, several babies cried the entire time, and a very drunk and obnoxious man was loud and demanding. The attendant just kept smiling and treated everyone politely.

After the plane landed, he stopped to tell her he was going to write some good things about her. She replied, “*Well, Dr. Hendricks, I don’t work for American Airlines.*” Noticing his puzzled look, she continued, “*I’m a Christian and I work for Jesus Christ.*”

Here’s our main idea today: *See your work as a way to worship and witness for the Lord.* Let’s jump right into our text from Ephesians 6:5-9. As we read it, I want us to pay close attention to how each verse challenges us to do our jobs for Jesus Christ.

Recognizing we have many retired people here who might be tempted to disengage from the message, you could apply this passage this way: *See your time as a way to worship and witness for the Lord.* This also applies to students: *See your studying as a way to worship and witness for the Lord.*

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.*

Before unpacking this passage, it’s important to understand that slavery was an accepted institution in the Roman world, where up to one-half of the population were slaves. Some have criticized Paul for not condemning slavery directly, but he did address both slaves and masters and showed them how their faith in Christ

should radically change how they relate to one another. Here and in other places in the Bible, he addresses them as equal before Christ and valued members of the body of Christ. As people came to understand the Bible's teaching on the dignity of life and the personhood of every image bearer, the gospel message ultimately led to the cessation of slavery.

I appreciate one pastor's insight: *"Though Scripture doesn't focus on reforming ungodly systems like slavery, it does focus on reforming the root of these systems – the human heart."*

The website *Got Questions* puts it like this: *"Biblical teaching is an inherent contradiction to racism and oppression, and like a solvent eating away at a material, the Bible progressively weakened those sins' acceptance in society...biblical ideals led to the abolition of practices that every other culture in history had embraced, such as slavery."*

While slavery in the Roman Empire was different from what went on in our country, slavery in America was a deplorable disgrace. It was horrific, cruel, and dehumanizing. Reprehensibly, some Christians used Scripture to justify slavery, and the church did not always stand up or speak out. At the same time, it was Christians who led the charge to overthrow slavery as verses like Galatians 3:28 took hold in their hearts: ***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."***

Slavery is sinful in all its forms, including the modern-day slavery of human trafficking. Racism is wrong and antisemitism is sinful, including the taking of American and Israeli hostages by Hamas. It's important to stand for Israel and against the terrorist group Hamas, while also praying for innocent Palestinians. The gospel is the only answer, to the Jew first and also the Greek.

Because there were so many slaves in the Roman Empire, there were lots of slaves and masters in the new churches. While Paul challenged bondservants and masters to see their roles as a way to worship God, we can apply this passage to employees and employers in the workplace today.

A recent Gallup study called "The State of the Global Workplace," found workers are experiencing staggering rates of dissatisfaction and disengagement. Sixty percent of people reported being emotionally detached at work and 19% said they are miserable. Only 33% reported feeling engaged. In the U.S. specifically, 50%

of workers reported feeling stressed at their jobs on a daily basis, 41% are worried, and 18% are angry.

Have you seen the bumper sticker that says, “*Work fascinates me, I can sit and watch it for hours?*” Here’s one that some of you may agree with: “*The worst day of fishing is better than the best day of working.*” Another one I’ve seen goes like this: “*Hard work may not kill me but why take a chance?*”

Our culture is confused about work. On one extreme, we have workaholics and on the other extreme are “workabhorics.” In the middle, the majority of people follow the philosophy of another bumper sticker: “*I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.*” Homer, the famous Greek writer, said that the gods hated humans so much that they invented work as a way to punish people.

While some people love their jobs, others can’t stand what they do for a living. Some time ago, I saw an employee sweeping the floor at a restaurant. I thanked him for what he was doing and told him he was doing a good job. Then, I asked him if he liked his job and he quickly replied, “*No, not at all. It stinks* [he actually used another word I won’t repeat]. In contrast, while getting my glasses adjusted this week, I asked the worker if she liked her job. She smiled and responded, “*Yes, I love my job. I get to help people and solve their problems.*”

For some, a career has become the altar on which they’ve sacrificed their lives. Work can very easily become our new religion, where we bow down and give our time. Someone has said that we *worship our work, we work at our play, and we play at our worship.*

Let’s put our text into context.

- According to Ephesians 5:18, we must be “***filled with the Spirit***” in order to live out the Lord’s expectations for us.
- The principle of mutual submission found in Ephesians 5:21 is the groundwork for marriage, parenting, and our jobs: “***Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.***”

While you may get tired at your job, or even be tired *of* your job, the Bible teaches that work has intrinsic value for at least two reasons:

- **God is a worker.** Genesis 1:1 states that God *created* the heavens and the earth. Genesis 2:2 calls this activity work: “***And on the seventh day God***

finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.” And He didn’t stop working after creation. In John 5:17, Jesus declared, *“My father is working until now, and I am working.”*

- **We are His co-workers.** Genesis 1:26 says that man is to “*have dominion over*” the creation. Genesis 2:15 states that Adam was placed in the garden to “*work it and keep it.*” Notice this work was given to Adam *before* creation was cursed because of his sin. 1 Corinthians 3:9 says: “***For we are God’s fellow workers.***”

The Hebrew word for *work* is also translated as *worship* and *service*. God has always intended our work to be an expression of worship and witness. Adam worshipped God by doing the work he was given to do. When we labor out of love for our Lord, we put on display the genius of God who created each of us uniquely to reflect His glory. When we work in concert with Him according to our giftedness and abilities, God is glorified, and we’re fulfilled because that’s what He’s made us to do.

See your work as a way to worship and witness for the Lord.

Expectations for an Employee

The majority of the verses in Ephesians 6:5-9 focus on employees. One pastor gives three reasons why our servanthood must be seen where we work.

- **It’s where we’re going to spend most of our life.** The biggest single block of time in your life is spent in the workplace.
- **It’s where your faith is most clearly seen.** It’s one thing to say you’re a servant when you’re in church, it’s another thing to live it out where you work.
- **It’s where servanthood is most needed.** That’s why you have to be a servant on the job, because there aren’t many servants out there. You’ll stand out if you’re a servant.

I see five expectations for employees.

1. Work obediently. Listen to the first part of verse 5: “***Bondservants, obey your earthly masters...***” The idea behind obeying is to “*yield by placing yourself in a subordinate position.*” It refers to willing service like we see in Psalms 123:2:

“Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress...” Jesus described the posture of an obedient servant in Luke 17:10: ***“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*** This is similar to what we read in Titus 2:9: ***“Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative.”***

2. Work respectfully. Check out the next phrase in verse 5: ***“...with fear and trembling...”*** When these two words are used together, they refer to fearing God. The idea behind this phrase is to show reverence, honor, and respect to your employer because you fear God. You ought to take your job performance so seriously that you worry about doing a poor job. A Christian should be the best worker because his work is an outflow of his worship and witness. 1 Timothy 6:1 says, ***“Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name and the teaching may not be reviled.”*** 1 Timothy 6:2 challenges us to not be ***“disrespectful.”***

3. Work sincerely. The next phrase in verse 5 says we are to serve ***“with a sincere heart.”*** This is also translated as, ***“singleness of heart.”*** The ***“heart”*** is the center of our being, where attitudes and actions come from. The idea is to work with focused concentration, unbridled attention, and absolute integrity. It’s the opposite of being a slacker or a sluggard. Verse 6 continues, ***“not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”***

One pastor writes: ***“Some of us are worried about witnessing to our co-workers. You want me to tell you the best way to witness at work? Do good work. Excellence opens doors for evangelism...Christians ought to be the best workers...we ought to be the most productive. We ought to be the ones working the hardest and giving 110% all the time. Why? Because we’re not just working for an earthly master but we’re working for Jesus Christ.”***

Someone who gives ***“eye-service”*** only works hard when the boss is watching. Years ago, during March Madness, CBS developed the “Boss Button.” When the boss walked by, and an employee was watching a basketball game, he could click the “Boss Button,” causing a spreadsheet to fill the screen. We’re called to be God-pleasers, not ***“people-pleasers.”*** We’re not to be hypocrites but rather people who do the will of God from our hearts. One translation renders it like this: ***“Don’t work only while being watched, as people-pleasers.”*** We’re to serve our

bosses with singleness of heart, not so much because they deserve it, but because Christ does.

4. Work reverently. Verse 7 is very clear that our real boss is Jesus: ***“rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.”*** Verse 5 says, ***“As you would Christ...”*** Verse 6: ***“As bondservants of Christ...”*** Verse 8: ***“receive back from the Lord...”*** Verse 9: ***“Their Master and yours is in heaven.”*** Ultimately, we are slaves to the Savior and as such, we must do our work well in a spirit of worship and witness. Colossians 3:23-24 says, ***“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...you are serving the Lord Christ.”***

According to a study of nearly 2,000 full-time office workers, most people aren't working for most of the time they're at work. The average worker is only productive for 2 hours and 53 minutes. If every Christian worked heartily for the Lord, more doors would open for gospel conversations.

5. Work expectantly. Verse 8 helps us see that even if the rewards are few in the workplace, we will be compensated in eternity: ***“Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or free.”*** This should bring great encouragement for those who serve in thankless jobs. The Lord remembers and He rewards. One of my pastor friends put it like this: ***“That means your job is not secular but sacred. All work done for God's glory is sacred and He will reward us richly for our labors in the workplace...there is a payday beyond a payday.”***

This lines up with Matthew 6:4: ***“Let your giving be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*** Hebrews 11:26 tells us Moses kept moving forward because ***“he was looking to the reward.”***

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Expectations for an Employer

Our passage ends with four expectations for employers, bosses, and managers.

1. Seek the welfare of your employees. Paul's challenge to masters in the first part of verse 9 is to follow the golden rule: ***“Masters, do the same to them...”*** These words would have been shocking in that culture. Everything that applies to employees also applies to employers as they are to work obediently, respectfully, sincerely, reverently, and expectantly.

If you're a Christ-following employer, supervisor, manager, or boss, it would be good to cultivate a mindset like Boaz in Ruth 2:4 when he greeted his employees this way: ***“And he said to the reapers, ‘The LORD be with you!’ And they answered, ‘The LORD bless you.’”*** He was spiritually sensitive to his workers by treating them with mutual respect. He also saw his job as a way to be very generous to Ruth. More about that on Father's Day weekend.

Paul described this kind of mutual submission in the Book of Philemon. After a slave named Onesimus stole some items and ran away from his master Philemon, he met Paul, heard the gospel and was converted. Paul sent Onesimus back to his master with this letter and called on Philemon in verse 16 to forgive him and to treat him ***“no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother.”*** This was countercultural because runaway slaves who stole from their masters were often tortured or executed.

2. Use positive reinforcements. The next phrase in verse 9 exhorts employers to ***“stop your threatening.”*** Employers must look for ways to encourage employees by celebrating what they're doing right.

3. Be submissive to the Lord. Verse 9 continues: ***“Knowing that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven...”*** In Matthew 25:21, Jesus said the way to be a ruler is to first be a servant: ***“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.”*** Warren Wiersbe points out that Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, and Nehemiah were first servants before God made them leaders.

4. God doesn't play favorites. Verse 9 concludes: ***“...there is no partiality with Him.”*** An employer is no better than an employee before God. Everyone is equal before Him. Romans 2:11 says ***“God shows no partiality.”*** James 2:1 says, ***“My brothers, show no partiality.”*** Employers should not think they're better than their employees.

One pastor writes: *“There are two things parents and bosses struggle with. We make threats, we crush dreams, we push people down, we play favorites, and we wonder why things don't work out...when you get to heaven, God is not going to ask you how much profit you made, or how many people you had working for you...He's only going to ask you one question: ‘How did you treat people?’”*

The story is told of an elderly missionary couple who were returning home on a ship after many years of sacrificial service in Africa. On the same ship was President Teddy Roosevelt, who had just completed a highly successful big game hunt. As the ship docked in New York harbor, thousands of well-wishers and dozens of reporters lined the pier to welcome Roosevelt home. But not a single person was there to welcome the missionaries.

As the couple rode to a hotel in a taxi, the man complained to his wife, *“It just doesn’t seem right. We give forty years of our lives to win souls in Africa, and nobody knows or cares when we return. Yet the president goes to Africa for a couple weeks to kill some animals and the whole world takes notice.”* But as they prayed together that night before retiring, they sensed the Lord saying, *“Do you know why you haven’t received your reward yet, My children? It is because you are not home yet.”*

Brothers and sisters, because we’re not home yet, let’s *see our work as a way to worship and witness*. Here are some ways we can do that.

Action Steps

1. See your workplace or campus as your mission field. See your co-workers and classmates as image bearers of God in need of the gospel. God has put you in proximity to people on purpose for His purposes. That’s why it’s essential you work hard, avoid gossip, negativity, foul language, and inappropriate jokes.

We’ve said this before, but it bears repeating. You are a missionary cleverly disguised as an engineer. You are a missionary cleverly disguised as a waitress. You are a missionary cleverly disguised as a welder. You are a missionary cleverly disguised as a nurse. You are a missionary cleverly designed as a business owner or boss. You are a missionary cleverly disguised as a truck driver. You are a missionary cleverly disguised as a student. You are a missionary cleverly disguised as a retiree.

2. See your work as a calling, not a career. Worship God, not your work. Don’t make your job an idol and don’t look to find your identity there. Significance, security, and satisfaction can only come from the Lord. By the way, if you’re a stay-at-home mom, this is where you worship and witness.

Harrison Butker, kicker for the Kansas City Chiefs, has been embroiled in controversy this week for his graduation speech at Benedictine College in Kansas.

I don't understand why people are calling for the NFL to punish him or even fire him for communicating Catholic doctrine at a Catholic college. I read the entire manuscript and what I saw was a celebration of the dignity of life, biblical masculinity, an appeal to purity, and the elevation of motherhood as a worthy calling.

He ended his speech with this challenge to the graduates: *"Make no mistake: You are entering into mission territory in a post-God world, but you were made for this. And with God by your side and a constant striving for virtue within your vocation, you too can be a saint. Christ is King."*

The word "vocation" comes from the word "voca," which means "to call." Don't just think of pastors as those in vocational ministry. In Exodus 31:3-5, God says this about a craftsman named Bezalel: *"I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs...in cutting stones and in carving wood, to work in every craft."*

If you want to find worth in your work, view your job as a calling, not just a career. A career can become the altar on which we sacrifice our lives in the pursuit of money and possessions. A calling involves recognizing that we are co-workers with God in accomplishing His purposes by being content, by working in order to meet our needs, and in order to give so that God can meet the needs of others through us.

3. Work hard at whatever you do. Someone once said, *"Hard work never killed anyone, but why take the chance?"* The Book of Proverbs has quite a bit to say about the importance of hard work:

- Proverbs 14:23: *"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."*
- Proverbs 21:25: *"The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work."*
- Proverbs 31:17 refers to a godly wife this way: *"She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks."*

Work hard even if your efforts go unnoticed, because they are not unnoticed by God. Your Heavenly boss sees everything.

4. Trust in the finished work of Christ. I have some really good news. You don't have to work in order to please God. Just before He died, Jesus cried out in

John 19:30, ***“It is finished!”*** This term was common in the world of finance and banking. When someone borrowed some money and paid it back, the banker would use this phrase to declare that the debt had been paid off. Literally, it means, *“Paid in full.”*

When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He paid the price for us. He took our moral liabilities and stamped “Paid in Full” across the ledger sheet of our lives. Our sin debt has been forgiven. Because of our moral failures and patterns of sin, we all deserve to be sentenced for our cosmic crimes against a holy God. Someone needs to pay the price for our sin. The Bible makes it clear that either we pay it -- or someone else needs to. We don’t have to work to gain God’s favor. In fact, if we try to work our way into Heaven, we’ll receive a paycheck that won’t make us very happy. Romans 3:23 says that the wages of sin is death.

Jesus paid the price with His life and God the Father accepted His death as full payment for all of our sins. He completed His work and now we don’t have to labor to get to Heaven. Salvation is a gift that we must receive by faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 puts it succinctly: ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”***

The worst type of slavery today is to be enslaved to sin and Satan. John 8:36 says, *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

Invitation