

## God's Design For The Workplace – Eph 6:5-9

Eph 6:5-9. This passage is the 4<sup>th</sup> and final way to submit *to one another out of reverence for Christ*. From 5:21. The first was wives submitting to husbands, then husbands to Christ, then children to parents, and now slaves to masters. Or in our context, employees to employers. Because while *slavery* is no longer practiced, the principles still apply. Giving us God's design for the workplace. You follow along. Eph 6:5.

*[5] Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, [8] knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. [9] Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.* (ESV)

➤ Some people not only *ignore* this passage in the Bible, but use it to dismiss the entire thing. Saying that because it condones *slavery*, they reject it altogether. Or at least the parts they don't like.

Except their *premise* is wrong. Completely so. The Bible *doesn't* condone slavery. Neither as a *whole*, nor in this passage. God's love for the *world* doesn't allow for slavery. God's command for *us* to love one another doesn't allow for it. Our love for *God* doesn't allow for it. And the *Gospel* doesn't allow for it; where the ground at the foot of the cross is level. So to reject the Bible because it supposedly condones slavery, is a poor decision based on a false premise.

➤ Not only that, but this *passage* doesn't condone slavery. The Bible as a *whole* doesn't condone it, and neither does this passage. That would contradict what the Apostle Paul says and implies elsewhere. Like in 1 Tim 1:10 where he condemns slave *trading*. A condemnation of the *entire* institution, because you can't separate slave *trading* from slave-ry.

Plus, he encourages slaves to gain their *freedom*, in 1 Cor 7:21; and appeals for the *release* of a slave in Philemon. And don't forget the principle he lays out in Phil 2:3; to count others more significant than yourself. So this passage *can't* condone slavery, or it would blatantly contradict what Paul says elsewhere.

➤ What's more, it's likely that Paul's not even *talking* about the kind of slavery we're thinking of. Chattel slavery. Where one man *owns* another. Because most of the slavery in Paul's day was indentured servanthood. Where people *voluntarily* sold themselves into servitude, and received wages, or goods, or services. Often times owning property and advancing socially. So Paul's probably not even *talking* about slavery as we know it.

But even if he was, even if that was in his mind, because chattel slavery did *exist* in his day, his words are still not an endorsement of the *institution*. It's not there.

What *is* there, is an exhortation to those involved, slaves *and* masters, to conduct themselves in a God-honoring way. Because more important than their freedom, is their testimony. More important than their position, is their integrity. More important than their situation, is their heart.

So whatever you do, don't *ignore* this passage, and don't dismiss the Bible as a whole because of it. Because while the *practice* of slavery has been abolished, praise God; the principles still apply. Principles for the workplace. Starting with this:

## Work as unto the Lord (v5-8)

That's the first part of God's design for the workplace. And the first part of *that*, is work. Activity involving mental and physical exertion, to achieve a desired result. Which, 60 or 70 years ago, was a no-brainer. It went without saying. Get a job, and *work*. But today, in a time of gross entitlement, poor work ethic, and laziness, it needs to be shouted. And modeled.

And the people who should model it most and best, are believers. Us. Because Paul says in 2 Thess 3, *if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat*. He emphasizes it. And by work there, he means toil and labor night and day so as not be a burden to anyone. (2 Thess 3:7-10)

So Christians ought to be the hardest working people around. The most diligent, most reliable, and most faithful.

➤ But the *primary* reason for that is not modeling it for others; or making a name for *ourselves*; but to represent Jesus and make a name for him. Because *we* work, as unto the Lord. At least we should. As if we're working directly for *him*. That's the focus *here*; the point of *this* passage. Work as unto the *Lord*. Repeated over and over again. V5.

*[5] Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ [work as unto the Lord], [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ [as unto the Lord], *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 [work as unto the Lord], and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven [watching, looking, observing], and that there is no partiality with him.*

Over and over again, the focus is working as if *Jesus* is your employer. *Jesus* is your manager. It's working as if he *knows* everything and sees everything. Because he does. It's working as if *he* does your annual review; *he* gives promotions; *he* gives raises. It's working as if he's *present*; in the room and by your side. It's working Coram Deo – in the presence of God, under the authority of God, for the glory of God.

That's *God's* design for believers in the workplace. Work; as unto the Lord.

And Paul gives us 5 ways. 5 *ways* to work as unto the Lord. The first is . . .

### • Obediently

Work obediently. V5 again. *Bondservants, obey your earthly masters*. Obey them. As in do what your employer says, the first time, in everything, with a good attitude. Same as kids. Just because you're an adult, doesn't mean you're exempt from doing what somebody says. Especially as an employee. Not that you can't ask questions or suggest improvements, but that your *first* impulse, your *first* response, should be obedience. Timely and willing. That's the first way to work as unto the Lord.

The second, is to work . . .

- **Respectfully**

Work *respectfully* as unto the Lord. The next phrase. *Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling*. (5a) Not fear of mistreatment or cowering for your life; paralyzed with trepidation because you might do something wrong. But with the utmost respect for the *authority* of your employer. The utmost honor for their *position*. The utmost consideration of their *leadership*.

Esteem your employer and manager as much as you possibly can. Just as you would esteem *Jesus* in their position. Because once again, v5 says, *obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling . . . as you would Christ*. Work respectfully.

Third, work . . .

- **Sincerely**

*Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart*. In other words, put your heart into your work. Genuinely care about it. *Care* about the company you work for. *Care* about the product. *Care* about the quality.

Few things are worse than an employee who gets the job done, but doesn't really care; it's just a paycheck. It's not great for customers, and it's certainly not great for owners. Never work for just a paycheck. It's not sincere.

➤ Nor is working just to *look* good, instead of doing good. V6. *Obey . . . not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers* [you know, to look good], *but* [work and obey] *as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart*. Don't work just to *look* good in the eyes of your boss, but to *do* good. Whether they see it or not. Notice you or not.

That's the will of God. To work sincerely, *from the heart* as it says, as if you're a *bondservant of Christ*. Empowered and constrained by *him*. An employee of the kingdom. On the payroll of heaven. Can you *think* of a greater motive?

*Care* about your work, and work sincerely.

4<sup>th</sup>, work . . .

- **Graciously**

From v7. Work and do God's will, Paul says, *rendering service with a good will*. A desire to bless your employer instead of hurt him. Extend grace instead of hate. *Good* will instead of ill will. Work graciously.

There's an example from antiquity that spurs *me* on in this respect. It's the last will and testament of a slave owner in the Roman empire, same as Paul, from 157AD; about a century after this. And in it, he frees his slaves "because of their good-will and affection." Apparently, despite their enslavement, they worked graciously. They rendered *service with a good will*. And makes you wonder if they were believers; rendering service *as to the Lord and not to man*, v7. (EBC, vol 11, 84)

The point is this: if *they* worked graciously, how much more should we? *Voluntarily* employed. How much more should *we* bless our employers? How much more should *we* extend good will?

You may not have the best job or best supervisor, but while you're there, work graciously as unto the Lord. It's God's desire and design.

And then 5<sup>th</sup>, work . . .

- **Expectantly**

V8. Work as unto the Lord, *knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free*. Voluntary or not Paul says, work expectantly. Because a reward from the Lord awaits. Whether in this life or the next.

When I was kid, our yard consisted of a sand/dirt mix that was particularly conducive to growing **sandburs**. These things. Little plants with pea-shaped burs that stick to your shoes and jeans like crazy. I remember pulling a dozen of them out of my shoelaces every time I went outside. I hated them.

And my mom used to give me a quarter for every wagonload of sandburs, that I pulled in our yard. Not a quarter for every sandbur, but every *wagonload*. And if the root wasn't attached, it didn't count.

Needless to say, the quarter didn't make it voluntary on my part. I *had* to pull the dumb things; because it was needed. And had I known this *verse* at that age, v8, I might have worked with a little better attitude. Dreaming of the riches in glory I'd receive.\*\*\*\*\*

*Whatever good anyone does* [v8], *this he will receive back*. It may not be in the form of money, and it may not be in the *timing* you'd choose; but it *will* be exactly what you need, when you need it. And a blessing you couldn't have imagined. For me, the blessing was a good yard and a good work ethic. Work expectantly.

5 ways, to work as unto the Lord. The first part of God's design for the workplace.

➤ The second comes from v9. Where Paul turns his attention to masters. Employers, bosses, managers. Saying – *Masters, do the same to them* [to bondservants, employees], *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*.

Just like employees should work as *unto* the Lord, employers should . . .

**Lead as for the Lord (v9)**

Because Jesus is Lord and master of supervisors and managers, just as much as he's Lord and master of laborers. *Stop your threatening* [Paul says], *knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven*.

Jesus is Lord of all. And in the workplace, that means those in charge should *lead* for him, just like those who follow *work* for him. Both are God's instruments, under God's authority, to accomplish God's purposes.

And once again, Paul gives us 5 ways to lead. 3 by implication, and two explicitly. By implication, because he says – *Masters, do the same to them*. (9a) As in, treat your employees just like they're supposed to treat you. The same ways.

Starting with . . .

- **Respectfully**

If you're in a position of leadership, lead those in your care respectfully. With the same *fear and trembling before the Lord*, v5, as they should have for you. Esteem them like they should esteem you. Honor them like they honor you. Consider them like they consider you. Lead *respectfully*. Because once again, you're doing it for the Lord.

Second lead . . .

- **Graciously**

*Rendering* [leadership] *with a good will*, v7. That's your service. Bless them instead of abusing them. Extend grace to those in your charge, instead of domineering over them. Show *good* will instead of ill will. Have *pure* motives instead of ill-motives. Humility instead of pride. Lead graciously.

Third, lead . . .

- **Expectantly**

*Knowing that whatever good anyone does* [including good leadership, good decisions, good care, and good pay], *this he will receive back from the Lord*. (v8) God blesses good leadership just like he blesses good work. Because when you get right down to it, it's *all* work. And most of us do *both* in our workplace. Most of us lead *and* follow. In which case you can double your expectation.

4<sup>th</sup>, and more *explicit*, is to lead . . .

- **Kindly**

V9 says – *Masters . . . stop your threatening*. Stop treating your employees or team members as if they're your slaves. As if you're God's gift to them. As if they're under your thumb. Stop holding their job over their head. Stop threatening to cut their pay, or demote them. Stop demeaning them. It's not right and it's not *kind*. It's not doing unto others as you'd have them do to you. Lead *kindly* for the Lord.

And last, lead . . .

- **Justly**

V9b. Lead as for the Lord, *knowing that he* [Jesus] *who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him*. He will judge masters just like he judges bondservants. Employers, just like employees. No favoritism, no deference, no partiality, no nothing. We're all going to be held to the same standard.

So make sure that when you lead, you lead justly. Righteously. Equitably. Showing no favoritism, no deference, and no partiality. If someone has the same qualifications, the same talent, the same output, and the same impact, treat them the same. Justly. Because at the end of the day, God will hold you accountable, and judge *you* justly.

5 ways to *lead* for the Lord, and 5 ways to *work* for the Lord. It's God's design and desire for the workplace.

Prayer – Lord, help us. Impress these truths on our heart, and help us to live them out in our jobs. Especially difficult ones. Give us the grace to be gracious. The love to be kind. The will to obey. And if something needs to change, work in our heart.

**You Are Loved**