

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **God's Perspective on Work**

Scripture: Ephesians 6:5-9

Code: 80-171

I want you to open your Bible, if you will, tonight to a portion of Scripture that we'll use as the setting for the message...Ephesians chapter 6...Ephesians chapter 6 verses 5 through 9. This is Labor Day weekend and I thought it would be a good time for us to focus on the issue of work and labor, as God has delineated it for us in the Word. This morning we looked at the antithesis of work, gambling. And we'll continue our look at that next Sunday morning as we wrap up that study. But for tonight I want us to address this matter of work from Ephesians chapter 6.

Let me begin reading in verse 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 eye service 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, he will receive back from the Lord whether slave or free. And, Masters, do the same thing to them and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and your's is in heaven and there is no partiality with Him."

We are obviously very much aware of the issues that face us in our society with regard to hard work, which has always been a part of the American ethic. We are a culture that is having difficulty with work at this particular time. We are in to leisure mostly, we are in to being entertained. We are being told as young people growing up today that somebody owes us a living and we should make demands for what we want and what we expect. We're producing a generation of young people who never see their parents work because even if they have two working parents, it's outside the home. They leave in the morning, they come back at night...all they know is work makes you irritable and work causes you not to get along too well and makes you bad parents and usually leads, very often, it leads at least in half the cases to divorce and the breakup of homes. So work is not a very popular theme. And while the parents are busy working and in many cases to make money, the young people are being raised by a generation telling them that the most important thing to occupy your time with is leisure and entertainment. And into that kind of lazy culture comes drugs and alcohol and sex and homosexuality and every other kind of thing.

We can only wonder what the next generation is going to perceive work to be and the value of work. Also with the exaltation of gambling, the propagation of the fantasy that somehow by just rolling the dice enough times you can win the big one, it's frightening to think about the work ethic that lies ahead of us.

And in addition to that, we are very used to the conflict that exists in the world of labor. We just watched very carefully the UPS strike, the latest in a long line of labor disputes daily on the front pages of the newspapers. We see the struggle in the world of labor and in the world of employment. We read about strikes. We read about walk-outs and threats and management fights and bankruptcies, etc., etc. Labor has put so much pressure on management and management has put so much pressure on labor that our whole basic work force is threatened. Spiraling inflation causes people to make more and more demands, it is caused by those very demands...it's just a kind of a self-feeding monster. Employees and employers are greedy, the employer wants more profit, the employee wants more wages. The government prints more money to try to accommodate everybody and the money is worth less. People spend more than they make, consequently they put themselves in serious credit-card debt, long-term debt by loans and mortgages...that continues to drive up inflation and create all kinds of problems. And then when people don't earn enough to pay for their debts, they demand more money. Eventually the employers cave-in under the pressure, pay more money and that raises the products and so the people who wanted more money to start with wind up paying more money for everything they buy. The government tries to step in and control and in order for them to do that, they raise the taxes and so we have less money. So the whole thing spirals.

And behind it all is just this age-old sin of greed, everyone wanting more for himself. The consumer screams for lower prices, less taxation and at the same time demands more pay. Can't happen. We defy the simplest principles of logic, the man who works in the automobile industry strikes for more and more money, the corporation has to pay him more. Because they want more too, they borrow from the government that doesn't have it so the government prints more money, raises inflation, also puts more taxes on people, then the corporation raises the price of the cars' cost to pay back the government and so it goes. And it all gets passed on to us. We get more taxes, more inflated wages, more of everything we don't want and sometimes less than what we do want. And it's all really driven by greed.

And I think a failure to understand the value and the honor of work, in fact, we could safely say that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and economic trouble is one of those kinds of evil. The sin of selfishness just escalates the problems. Greed is a controlling element, materialism is a controlling element, as we know, in our society. Money-hungry people drive this economy in great measure. It's not the love of work for work's sake, it's not the nobility of work as it once was. It's not the self-satisfaction of making something and seeing it made and taking pride in your product. Certainly as we continue to be a more service-oriented and less-manufacturing oriented and less manual-labor oriented society, we're going to have a harder time seeing the actual product made with our hands and enjoying the satisfaction of work.

It takes us, I think, back if we're going to see any kind of right perspective to the Word of God and we have to understand what God has said about work. That's a big, big subject and I'm not going to try

to cover all of it tonight. But I do want you to come with me to this very important portion of Scripture in Ephesians chapter 6 and just to sort of reaffirm God's perspective on work. And it's not driven by greed and it's not driven by selfishness and it's not driven by self-fulfillment and it's not driven by a hunger for power...it's driven by an understanding of what God has ordained. And the over-arching principle that must work in a healthy economic environment, believe it or not, is a principle of submission.

If you go back in the context of Ephesians 6, you go all the way back to where this whole discussion began, you will find yourself in verse 21. It says, "And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ...or in reverence for Jesus Christ." At the foundation of all good relationships whether they are marriage relationships or whether they're parent-child relationships, or whether they are labor relationships, behind, underneath, providing the foundation of all good relationships is this understanding of mutual submission in the fear of Christ...that we have a responsibility borrowing words from Philippians 2, "To look not on our own things, but the things of others and consider others better than ourselves." That's what makes marriage work, verse 22 down to the end of the chapter deals with how a wife submits to her husband and how a husband submits to the meeting the needs of his wife. Chapter 6 verses 1 through 4 discuss how children submit to their parents and how parents submit to their children by not exasperating them, but by submitting to the spiritual discipline and instruction of the Lord that will nurture them in the faith and bring them to the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

All of us if we're going to have right relationships in every environment must grasp the great truth of submission, we must grasp the great truth of Philippians 2 and that is that we are to look not on our own things but the things of others, considering others better than ourselves, even as Christ did who though He was equal with God thought it not something to grasp but gave it up and submitted Himself, took upon Him the form of a servant, was humbled and in the likeness of man became obedient unto death for the sake of sinners who were far less worthy than Himself. There is the great and classic illustration of submission. It is the incarnation, the kenosis, the self-emptying of Jesus Christ for unworthy sinners. A wife should be submissive to her husband, though he's not perfect. A husband should submit himself and all of his strength and all of his capacities and all that he has to offer for the meeting of the needs of his wife, both physical and spiritual. Children should submit themselves to the care of their parents and parents should submit themselves to the process of rearing their children, giving their children what is best and what is going to lead them to the knowledge of God in Christ.

The same thing is true in the realm of work. It is an area where submission must take place. Slave or, if you will verse 5, employees and then in verse 9, masters or employers must also submit to what is best for the other. The worker submits to the one who is over him, the one who is over him exercises a kind of submission in that he seeks the very best for his employee. And we'll see that unfold.

This is all, and I think it's important to point this out, this is all workable when energized by the Holy Spirit. So go back with me, if you will, to verse 18, "Do not get drunk with wine," that is dissipation, "but be filled with the Spirit." There was this foolish idea among the pagan religions that if you wanted to commune with a deity you could induce that communion by drunkenness. That was the way it was in the mystery religions, that was the way it was in the many religions of the Roman Empire. They were endeavoring to induce through drunken orgies some kind of communion with deities. They would have had a lot in common with Timothy Leary who believed that if you got high on drugs you had a religious experience. That's exactly what they were saying. And so if you were drunk enough, you could somehow transcend this space/time world and commune with the other world and the deities that were there. The Apostle Paul says that's not how you get in touch with God, you do it by being filled with the Spirit.

When your life is under the control of the Holy Spirit, first of all, there will be a joy that causes you to speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord. There will be an attitude of gratitude, verse 20, you'll be giving thanks for all the things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father, and then you will find the strength and the power and the resolve to submit to one another. This is the work of the Spirit of God and it certainly should manifest itself and likely will only manifest itself among those who follow God's pattern, those who belong to Jesus Christ.

So what we're talking about here is not a new economic plan for the United States because unregenerate people who have not the Spirit can't be expected to live any other way than the way they live. We can't expect anything else from unregenerate people than what we see and what we see is greed and materialism and strife and conflict and selfishness and laziness and the love of entertainment and all of that stuff just consuming our culture and we cannot expect anything other than that because there is no spiritual resource to resist the overwhelming world system that has been designed by Satan to promote the very things that I just mentioned. But certainly among believers, we can set a standard. We who possess the Holy Spirit, who belong to God and therefore are the temple of the Holy Spirit in whom the Spirit of God dwells, can be filled with the Spirit which means to be led by, to be dominated by His influence so that we are at the same time full of joy, full of gratitude and full of an attitude of submission whether we be employers or employees.

Now a little bit about the terms "servant" and "master" because they reflect an immediate identification with a slavery system. Slavery isn't a very popular thing today and there are some who would say the Bible is an advocate of slavery and therefore is to be rejected. So we need to speak to this issue because the terms here "slave" and "master" are clearly used.

First of all, in ancient times slavery was the way of life. In the Roman Empire slavery dominated. And slavery, like any kind of employment relationship was both good and bad depending on the

character of the people involved. And we have many grievances today without having slavery. In fact, all kinds of government rules and government laws and government watchdog organizations have come in to existence in order to watch out for the grievances of abused or mistreated employees. There is a great effort to deal with grievance that exists within the free market enterprise of the United States.

So the point is this, slavery is not the issue. There were good masters and bad ones, there were good slaves and bad ones. And very often there were cruel masters who abused their slaves, and very often there were wicked slaves who abused and stole from their own masters who were being good to them. So when you think about slavery, you have to understand that it was THE way of life and it could be good and it could be bad. It could be a very profitable and beneficial form of employment for people. On the other hand, it could be an evil form of oppression. On the other hand, some slaves served their masters well and therefore prospered greatly in their lives, and others were criminal in their intent and their behavior and suffered immensely because of it.

But the terms are only meant to imply to us a relationship between an employee and an employer, nothing more is implied. There certainly is not some advocacy of some oppressive kind of bondage or slave kind of environment where people were abused.

Among the Greeks, admittedly it was common practice to conquer a nation and enslave that nation, make them slaves. And very often there was a severity in that slavery that would be very distasteful to God. It was also very unkind and inhumane to sell slaves willy-nilly because in so doing families were broken up all over the place, and that occurred quite frequently, even in the United States in the early years of slavery.

In the Greek times on the island of Delos, for example, as many as ten thousand slaves were sold according to one record in one day, severing marriages and severing families. Among the Romans, particularly there seems to have been a greater cruelty than some other environments, from the Roman viewpoint the supremacy of the Roman mentality, slaves often had no rights and very often were given no protection and given no kindness. In fact, kindness to them may well in the Roman environment have been the exception.

However, in other environments outside the Roman Empire it was not so extreme. In fact, in the Old Testament we know we have slaves and frequently they are mentioned in the Old Testament and some of them, as you well know, loved...in fact, adored their masters and the families who belonged to their masters. In the Old Testament we see quite a different perspective. Having servants and slaves was not at all a moral evil. In fact, it was a wonderful way of caring for a worker. Very often someone who was a slave, an employee of a family lived with that family, enjoying all the benefits, all the wealth and prosperity, all the food, all the fellowship, all the joys of that family. There is no dispensing of slavery as in the Old Testament as if it were in itself evil, but there is a serious

regulating of how both masters and servants conducted themselves. Servants would be carefully protected and honored and respected, just as anyone else was to be. They were to be treated like anybody else. They were not to be mistreated. Whatever was true of the best of people in terms of social treatment was to be true of the lowliest of people.

And throughout, particularly, the book of Exodus, and I won't have time tonight to read all of it, particularly the book of Leviticus, you will read information given about how those who were slaves were to be cared for and how they were to be treated and how they were to be protected. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, for example, it specifically tells how to treat a hired man, how to make sure he's appropriately cared for and very careful instruction is given by God. Forbidden was man stealing, that would be slave stealing; forbidden was kidnapping, someone to make them a slave against their will. In fact, in Exodus 21:16 it says, "Whoever steals a man, whether he sells him or is found in possession of him, shall be put to death." That's where our kidnapping laws come from. Stealing a slave was a capital offense.

Certainly abuses in modern slavery we don't want to defend. When slavery existed, the form of slavery that existed in the Old Testament, it was regulated by God's laws of kindness and care. And slaves were to be protected like children, and they would be cared for like family members. For many of them it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. In fact, there was a tradition in Israel that a slave could go against the door and put his earlobe against that door and have that pierced with an awl as a sign that he wanted to be a lifelong servant of his master. Because his master had become so beloved to him, he wanted to remain there. You remember, that according to the law of Israel, every fiftieth year was the Jubilee Year and all property reverted to its original owner and all slaves were set free. Many of them didn't want that. They wanted to stay where they were and they wanted to make that covenant visible because it was a benediction and a blessing to them.

So when we talk about slavery, you can't just assume by that that it's something that God rejects. It's also true that even in the New Testament there was no effort to destroy slavery as a system. It was a workable system. It was a system of employment in which the employer in many cases literally took over the care of his employee. It was like a company store where housing and food and all the care was granted by the employer. We have much of that today where employers provide a salary, they provide an insurance policy, they provide a retirement fund, they provide medical care...all of those kinds of things, everything short of providing the actual housing while at the same time paying the employee enough so that he can provide his own housing. So it's not a lot different.

The issue biblically is the issue of how these people interact with each other. And abuses, whether you're talking about slavery in America where slaves were whipped and beaten, or whether you're talking about slavery under the Roman Empire where they were killed without recourse in the courts, or whether you're talking about sweat shops in the Orient that we read about every once in a while, uncovered where American companies are having things manufactured under intolerable conditions,

abusing young children in those environments, anything like that, whatever the nature of that employment is unacceptable to God. And so, when we come to the Word of God, we want to remind ourselves that God does not advocate slavery as a social form, nor does God deny that it should exist, but rather that whatever that form of employment might be, it should be regulated by the right attitudes.

In fact, even today there are many people who are blessed to live in wealthy estates and wealthy families and they enjoy their life there and they're provided everything that they need. There are young ladies in our own church who work as nannies and who reside in comfortable surroundings and have the joy of working for Christian families and caring for children in some way or another, often they're in non-Christian families and have an opportunity to witness for Christ. There are environments in which being cared for in an extensive way is very, very beneficial. Certainly around the world many mission fields exercise this marvelous, marvelous privilege. They have employees among the natives of various lands who come and live in their homes and they're able to lead them to Christ and provide that Christian environment for them which is very different than the culture they've come from.

Cruelty was to be punished, according to Exodus 21, by the freedom of the slave. If ever you were cruel to a slave, Exodus 21:26 and 27 says that slave was to be freed. And if ever you kidnapped one, as I read earlier from the same chapter, it was a capital offense and you would pay with your life. And again, there are a number of regulations. I don't want to get in to all of them, I was just thinking of Deuteronomy 23:15, "You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall live with you in your midst in the place where he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him, you shall not mistreat him." The idea here is you might have a servant who is being mistreated and he escapes...the escape being that he flees because his life is perhaps at stake and he comes and he finds solace with you. Don't give him back to one who abused him, take care of him and don't mistreat him. And there are other instructions like that. But that's just to give you the sense of it.

All servants, as I said, were to be released in the Jubilee Year, there is even indication that in the seventh year, every Sabbath Year, servants were released. In fact, if I remember right, in Leviticus 25 you released them every seven years, but if the Jubilee Year came before a seventh year, they would be released in the Jubilee Year.

When they had served you for a period of time, "They're to be sent away with full supply so that that next phase of their life, so that before that next phase there's some coverage there in the transition." And as I said, the case was often true that the servant wanted to stay because the conditions were so good, Exodus 21:5 and 6 talks about that.

Now when you come in to the New Testament and you look at the Jewish structure outside the Roman picture, you see some of the same good features of the servant/master relationship. Let's look at Luke chapter 7, for a moment, and I'll kind of hurry through this so we can get to the text. But Luke 7:1, "When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people He went to Capernaum," speaking of Jesus, "and a certain centurion's slave who was highly regarded by him was sick and about to die." Here is a centurion, he would be a Roman living in Israel and he has a slave and there is a tremendous mutual respect. In fact, that literally means, as the marginal note says, to whom he was honorable and he's sick and about to die. "When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave." Here was one who was very precious to his master. "And when they had come to Jesus they earnestly entreated Him saying, 'He's worthy for You grant this to him for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.' Now Jesus started on His way with him and when He was already not far from the house the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I'm not worthy for You to come under my roof,'...he was a Gentile...'for this reason I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word and my servant will be healed.'" Of course, Jesus marvels at the great faith of this man and verse 10 says he was healed. When they got back he found the slave in good health.

So here is an illustration of a wonderful, loving relationship. It was an employment relationship that had all the positive character of any employment relationship.

In Galatians chapter 3 verse 28 there is a very important statement made that equalizes both slave and master spiritually. It says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." When it comes to employment, when it comes to socialization, when it comes to culture, when it comes to economics, when it comes to work, there are going to be inequalities, not everybody can be on the same level. But when it comes to the spiritual realm, when it comes to the body of Christ, there are no inequalities. Everyone is equal. Christianity equalizes everyone. And nowhere was that played out more dramatically than in the local church. Why? Because many cases the believers were the poor...not many noble, not many mighty...it was the base, it was the common, it was the poor folks, and very often the elders and the teachers would come from the ranks of the poor and they would wind up having spiritual leadership over their own employers. That's true even in our church in some cases.

In Colossians chapter 3 and verse 11, it says again, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, uncircumcised and circumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all and in all." There is no difference...no partiality.

And so, in Christ on the spiritual level there's no difference in a marriage. Are you ready for this? There's no difference spiritually between parents and children who know Christ. There's no difference in the work place between two who know Christ, whatever might be their strata. So we're



not talking about spiritual differences, we're only talking about those things that are for the ordering of our society and for the accommodation of necessary achievement in the area and realm of work.

In Revelation 18 verse 13, along this line just one other Scripture, "And cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives..." Interesting. This indicates that even in the end of time, even in the final form of Babylon there is going to be some form of employment. Literally the word "slaves" is bodies and it could be read, "Bodies and souls of men." There are going...and they're listed there with sheep and cattle and horses and chariots and there will be a mentality in the end of the age that men are just like beasts of burden, part of Antichrist's empire. The Old Testament and the New Testament condemn that and Revelation 18 shows the judgment of God falling on the final form of world government under Babylon which includes slavery of the worst kind in which men and women are treated as if they're nothing more than cattle and sheep and horses and chariots.

Now let's go back to Ephesians, that just gives you a bit of a broad look at this matter. It's a little hard for me to cover all the ground in one time but those are some perspectives that I think set a foundation for our understanding. So as we come to the text, what we're talking about here is not slavery that belongs to the Antichrist's world, it's not slavery that was the abusive kind in the Roman Empire even though there was good employee relationships, good master/slave relationships at that time. What we're talking about here is simply regulating employer/employee relations, whatever may be the social design of those things...whether they are "show up at 8 o'clock in the morning and leave at 5" kind of relationships and live your own life the rest of the time independent of your work environment, or whether they are "in house" kind of environments where you work within a company framework.

I remember being up in the far end of Nevada somewhere on a dead-end road that you go 150 miles on and it dead ends in a company store where they mine and everybody lived there and everybody worked there. Whether you're talking about that kind of environment that some people might liken to a plantation in America or other parts of the world, even in Africa, whatever might be that structure, whether you are designated as a servant in a household or whether you are a vice president in a corporation directly under the command of the CEO of that corporation, the issue is what is the nature of your relationship in the employment environment as a Christian...that is the issue before us. And for Christians it is to be the outflow of the working of the Holy Spirit. And when we're filled with the Spirit we carry into the work place an attitude of joy, an attitude of gratitude, and an attitude of submission.

Let's look, first of all then, at the submission of the servants...the submission of the employees, verses 5 to 8. "Slaves or employees, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling in the sincerity in your heart as to Christ, not by way of eye service 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 you will receive back from the Lord whether slave or free." Here's the pattern for all employees, folks, it's right here...from Christian slaves in Paul's time to Christian employees today.

And by the way, Jesus never tried to abolish slavery and Paul never tried to abolish it either. They did endeavor to deal with its abuses, and right here they're doing that. You see, the focus is on man's relationship to God and that's what Christ was concerned about and that's what Paul was concerned about.

He was not concerned about the political form of things, the social form of things. He was not concerned about concentrating on somehow altering society externally, or altering it economically, or altering it socially, or altering it culturally. The Bible never attempts to make some lasting sociopolitical effect. It just wants to work with men's hearts. God wants to change the heart and all injustices disappear where you have Spirit-filled people, right relationships can be generated.

So they taught that whatever the present structure might be, here's how you are to act. A solution to all of our labor problems is love coming from both sides and we as Christians need to demonstrate that. There were probably six million slaves, at least, in the Roman Empire and yet nowhere in the New Testament is slavery ever attacked. In fact, slavery is borrowed as an apt analogy of Christians relationship to God. And Paul happily calls himself a servant of God, a servant of Jesus Christ. We are called slaves of God as well. So rather than overturn that, Paul makes it the analogy by which we can identify our own service.

In Paul's day the kind of terrible and fatal idleness had also fallen on the citizens of Rome. There...it was obvious that Rome was the mistress of the world and Rome was developing entertainment and it was also developing a lazy society. And many Roman citizens began to think that it was beneath their dignity to work and so they had to export slaves from the conquered nations and bring them in and make them do all the work. Practically all the work was done then by the lowest level of slaves, even...even those who taught in the field of medicine were slaves. Very often the closest friends of emperors were their slaves...their secretaries were slaves, those who handled their wardrobe were slaves, those who cared for their domestic needs were slaves, those who prepared their food were slaves, those who served them in every realm. And so there were some good relationships and some bad ones.

But the Roman culture became divided into those three classes. You had the elite people, then you had the mass in the middle who thought they were too good to do the work. And then you had the slaves who did most all the work. And when they thought of those slaves in that sort of bottom rung, Varro, for example, divided agricultural instruments into three classes. He said the mute...the mute agricultural instruments are the vehicles, the wagons, the inarticulate instruments are the cattle and

the articulate agricultural instruments are the slaves...just a beast who can talk. That was largely a Roman view.

In fact, Cato gave advice to a man taking over a farm. He said, "Old slaves must be thrown out on the scrap heap to starve. When a slave is ill, it's sheer extravagance to issue him normal rations. The old and sick slave is only a broken and inefficient tool, just pitch him." Gaius, the Roman lawyer said, "The master possess the power of life and death over his slave." They actually believed that. If a slave ran away he was branded in the forehead with an "F," fugitivus. He wore that the rest of his life and if caught would be killed. Philemon, by the way, is a book that deals with it.

Augustus crucified a slave because he killed his pet quail. Vitruvius Pollio slung a slave still living to savage eels in his fish pond because he broke a crystal goblet, it is reported. And so it went.

And so there was a demeaning attitude that could easily exist in people's minds as they looked to the people who did the work, those who served. And there could be tremendous hostility at the level of the workers toward those who were the employers. And so it was in that environment that the Scripture says in verse 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."

This is doulos, it means a bond slave, someone in the line of service in bondage to a master. And this stands for every employee and the first thing, and I want you to just follow a little outline, the first thing is they're called to right behavior...right behavior. Be obedient...be obedient. Same word, by the way, exact same word as in verse 1 where it says, "Children are to obey their parents." Same word. If you're employed by someone, you're to obey them. Spirit-filled Christians will. And that's a good thermometer on your spiritual temperature. It's a present tense verse, "Keep on obeying."

Now some of you might say, "Well, you don't understand my employer, he's not fair, he's unjust and I refuse to obey. And we have a right to protest and we have a right to strike and so forth and so forth." Look at 1 Peter just a minute, 2:18, 1 Peter 2:18, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect...listen to this...not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable." Wow. Even to those who are abusive, even to those who are unreasonable, you are to submit yourselves.

That goes on from verse 18, verse 19, "For this finds favor if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly, for what credit is there if when you sin and are harshly treated you endure it with patience, but if when you do what is right and suffer for it, you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God for you have been called for this purpose." Wow...what a thought.

Peter knew the scene when he wrote that. Slaves had become Christians and they were getting even worse treatment. But the principle didn't change...be obedient to those that are your masters according to the flesh...that's your human masters. The principle never changes. This is what holds society together. Society cannot survive rebellion and anarchy and protest, it tears society apart. Be subject no matter what kind of employer you have. It is our witness, it is our goal to hold things together, even though we are abused and we commit ourselves to our faithful Creator, even as Christ who was so mistreated and Peter uses Him as the example in that chapter. A Christian employee must demonstrate to the world that Christ has not made him a disgruntle rebel but diligent in his work. He has a new imperative and a new inspiration for honest, faithful work no matter how he's treated. If unjustly punished, bear it meekly, patiently with complete forgiveness and wait for the Lord to bless or give you a new environment.

Undoubtedly this passage has primarily in view a Christian employer. And it posed a unique problem...I'm saying the passage here, the one in 1 Peter a non-Christian employer, but this could well have in view a Christian employer. It provided a sort of strange situation because the Christian was being told in his meeting with the other believers that they were all equal. And then he would go to work and some other Christian would be telling him what to do and in the early church they were trying to sort that all out...as well as having non-Christian employers.

In any case, whether your employer is a Christian which could be applied in this text, or a non-Christian, which is certainly applied in the 1 Peter text, the response is the same. You are to obey. That is God's design. And He has designed authority in marriage. He has designed authority in the family, parents over children. He has designed authority in the church, elders over the congregation. He has designed authority nationally in that you have government rulers that care for your welfare, Romans 13, and punish the evil and benefit the good and they bear not the sword in vain, and you're to follow their direction. And there's authority given even in the work place, in the social structures that cause men to be productive which is part of the fulfillment of the image of God in him. Our testimony for Christ must be seen in our obedience, our faithfulness in our daily task, otherwise our faith flunks and the name of Jesus is discredited. If you are lazy or unfaithful or disobedient or malcontent, or greedy, or jealous, etc., you bring reproach on Jesus Christ. And if your employer is a Christian, don't abuse that privilege but rather render service even greater if possible, more diligent and more faithful to that Christian employer...even though you're one in Christ. Don't take advantage of your Christian boss. Whether you have a good boss or a bad boss, nothing really changes.

Listen to Titus 2:9, "Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well pleasing, not argumentative, not stealing, but showing all good faith...that means being a faithful employee...that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." How are you going to convince an unconverted boss God is a saving God who transforms lives if you're not a submissive employee? That's the issue. It's an evangelistic purpose.

So the first thing is right behavior. Secondly, right perspective. Right perspective is bound up in the phrase, "According to the flesh." This is nothing more than a human temporal relationship. Understand that. The right behavior is submission, the right perspective is it's simply a fleshly relationship. He has authority over you, over you only in that area...not in the spiritual realm, in the spiritual realm you're one with Christ. When it comes to spiritual issues, if there's a sin in your boss's life, you can confront that sin spiritually. If there's an opportunity to disciple your boss because he's not as spiritually mature as you are, you need to take that opportunity and engage yourself in that. You need to pray for his spiritual strength. You need to provide resources and material to him. You need to encourage him in his spiritual life. It may well be that an employee is an elder or a leader, a teacher in the church who has oversight over his own boss in the assembly of the redeemed on the spiritual level, but that does not effect the labor arena. According to the flesh, the right perspective, you're to be obedient.

Thirdly, a right attitude. You have to bring to this the right attitude. What is it? It's a very interesting statement, verse 5, "Fear and trembling." Now you say, "What am I supposed to be, living in terror of my boss?" No, it's really not fear and trembling of him, it's fear and trembling of...whom?...God. I mean, sort of behind Him, you should show respect to your boss, you should show an amount of regard for your boss and all those who are over you. But behind that is God who has ordained these relationships. We're not calling here for cowering servility in abject terror. But a healthy respect and a healthy reverence for the fact that God has ordained this kind of structure and this kind of order in human life and you should have a healthy fear of offending the employer who has been given the place of leadership in your life in the work place...and been given that place by God.

It's a fear and trembling for anyone whom the Lord has assigned. That's why in Romans 13 it says the police or soldiers are instruments of God, ministers of God, who bear not the sword in vain, submit to them as to God, reverence for the Lord and for the law of authority and submission which is built into the fabric of human life. That employer of yours has been allowed to be there by God. It is a service to God that you render by being submissive to your employer.

And then he adds fourthly, the right commitment...the right behavior, the right perspective, the right attitude, the right commitment...in the sincerity of your heart...in the sincerity of your heart. That means that you're not doing this hypocritically. I'll tell you, the only way you can really be a good employee, a really great employee is when it's from the heart...honest, upright, undivided, conscientious, genuine loyalty and commitment to do your very best. That's what God asks for. And as I quoted from Titus 2:10, it is that you may adorn the doctrine of God and demonstrate that He's a saving God because of what He's done in your life. Make it your ambition, 1 Thessalonians 4:11 says, to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands just as we commanded you so that you may behave properly toward outsiders. So important.

You give sixty minutes of work for every sixty minutes of pay. You do it with the right commitment. Singleness of heart simply means an undivided attention. It means singularity of focus, the absence of hypocrisy, no division in your loyalty.

And then with the right motive. The right motive is very clear in verse 5, "As to Christ." You know, that shows me that there is no distinction between your Christian life and your work life. There isn't any such thing. There's nothing in your life that's secular. You don't have a spiritual life and a secular life, you just have your life. And everything you do, whether you're working on an assembly line, or whether you're working as a secretary, or whether you're working in some kind of paper work, or whether you're doing some manual task or whether you're doing construction or whether you're teaching school, or whether you're running employees here and there and underneath the head of your company, whatever it is you're doing is all done unto Christ. It's all sacred. Your whole life is a sacred act of worship...your whole life.

"Whatever you do," 1 Corinthians 10:31, "do it all to the glory of God." Your job is your service to Jesus Christ, just as much an offering to His glory as your prayer. That's right, or your Bible reading, or going to church...when you go to work tomorrow that is an opportunity for you to express your love to Jesus Christ. You are to work and offer your service to an earthly employer as if you were serving Jesus Christ. Every Christian is in full-time Christian service to Jesus Christ, working to God's glory that others may be brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And if you have a Christian who is discontent with his job, who is a poor worker, who is lazy, not diligent, seeks to get out of every task, not willing to volunteer for the extra things...it is a dishonor to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people say, "Well, you know, I wish God would make me a missionary, I wish He would have made me a preacher or a teacher or a Christian worker." Let me tell you something. You are a servant of Jesus Christ. You are in full-time ministry all the time, ministering to the glory of Christ whatever you do...whatever you do. It's no different for you to do your job to the maximum ability for the glory of Christ than it is for me to prepare this message to preach to you the honor of Jesus Christ.

Then Paul adds in verse 6, "Not by way of eye service as men pleasers, but as slaves to Christ doing the will of God from the heart." It's back to that singularity of heart. I guess we could call this the right diligence, if you just want to keep adding a little outline. The right behavior, perspective, the right attitude, the right commitment, the right motive, and the right diligence...you do it not by way of eye service. In other words, putting on a show while the boss is watching or when it's time for somebody to come and evaluate you, or the month that's just before pay increases. Don't just do the minimum and get by, don't be marginal, don't be watching to see who's looking, don't just try to look good on the surface. This is incompatible with the Spirit-filled Christian life because I'll tell you something, folks, there's somebody who is always looking, always looking. Listen to Colossians 3:23, it says this,

"Whatever you do, do your work heartily as to the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance." Much more important than whether you get a raise or not is whether the Lord rewards you. "It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." Boy, that is so good, Colossians 3:23 and 24.

You serve Him, so you do the will of God from the heart. And what is God's will? That you work hard, that you work with reverence and respect for the authority over you, that you work without an eye for the boss, that you do your very best from the heart, from the inner man, not superficially, but genuinely.

Then verse 7 adds, "With good will render service, or literally a ready mind as to the Lord and not to men." I guess we could add the right diligence here...to the right diligence we could add the right...the right eagerness. What he's talking about here is an aggressiveness that says I'm anxious, I'm not just reluctantly willing to do this, I'm going to grit my teeth and try to pull it off, but I just can't wait to get at this because I understand what it is. I'm up in the morning, I'm in there getting ready, I'm firing out of there...why?...because I have to go serve Christ today. I'm going to serve Him in my hammer and nails, I'm going to serve Him in my classroom where I teach the children, I'm going to serve Him while I fix some cars, I'm going to serve Him while I'm making hamburgers, I'm going to serve Him while I'm pushing papers across my desk, I'm going to serve Him while I'm traveling around selling people whatever I'm selling them. I'm not working for men, I'm serving Jesus Christ in the midst of a watching world, I am His servant. Wow, what a perspective.

Every single piece of work you do, every hour of every day must be good enough to show to God and say, "Lord, this is my offering to You. What do You think?"

You think that's probably frightening for the preacher, and it is. People ask me how much satisfaction I get out of preaching. Answer...not much. You understand that? Not much because I'm my own worse critic and this is a very formidable responsibility and not one that anybody wants to enter into lightly because the man who doesn't offend with his mouth is a perfect man and all such offenses are recorded by God who will judge us according to what we've said. Stop being so many teachers for theirs is a greater condemnation. This is a grave responsibility and truly it is the offering that I give to the Lord that is most important to me. I'm here to tell you what the Word of God means and I don't want to lay my hand to the Word of God and not get it right because this is THE sacred book. It is a formidable thing I do. And may I shake you loose a little bit by reminding you that whatever you do is equally offered to the Lord and demands the same kind of commitment.

And I say when you say how much satisfaction do you get out of your preaching, and I say not much, the reason is because I'm my own worse critic and most of the time am dissatisfied with what I offer to the Lord. Because I always feel like I barely scratch the surface of what could have been said or should have been said. But no Christian has a secular job. They don't exist. And money at your job

is not your motive. The joy of serving Jesus Christ is. And that has its reward in the heart. You seek to please men, you'll corrupt your motives. You seek money you'll corrupt your motives. Do your job for God's glory, your motive is pure and God's blessing will be your reward.

And verse 8 is the greatest incentive of all. This is the capstone. Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord whether slave or free."

There might be some difficulties in being a slave socially, but God is going to reward you whether you're slave or free for what you've rendered to Him. That's such a great incentive. Christ is the final pay master. He will give the final payroll. Wow, that's why Paul said to the Corinthians, it's a small thing what men say about me, small thing what they think, it's a small thing with I think, what really matters is what does God think?

A soldier in the Roman Empire could allow his wages to accumulate with the paymaster until his service ended. And a wise soldier would do that because he would say, "My meals are provided, my clothing is provided. As long as I'm in the ranks I have everything I need in life and rather than waste my pay, the paymaster could keep his pay until all of his service was rendered and he would receive it at the end." And I think Paul looked at life that way. As a Christian he was saying...I'm going to wait the day when the final paymaster gives me everything I've earned through all the years of soldiering. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly and My reward is with Me to give to every man according as his work shall be."

I really am not interested in squabbling right now with money, I'm not interested in working with poor motives, selfishly and losing my witness. I would rather give everything to what the Lord has called me to do and then let Him pay me in the very end and I can only hope that He would say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." There is no secular work. It's all service to Him.

Finally then we turn from the servant to the master for one final word in verse 9. "And masters," because most of us not only work for somebody but have somebody working for us, and it says, "Masters, do the same things to them." Oh, that sums it up, doesn't it? The very same things to them.

Well what does that mean? Serve them with honor and respect. Serve them sincerely. Serve them as if you were serving Jesus Christ. Serve them without hypocrisy. Do for them what is good and beneficial as if to the Lord and not to men. And treat your employees in such a way that will bring an eternal reward.

Wow. Serve your employees as an act of worship to God. Serve your employees as a service to Jesus Christ. Don't use them to get rich. Treat your servants, your employees with respect as you would Jesus Christ who Himself was a servant.



And the greatest masters are those who serve. Isn't that what it says in Matthew chapter 20? "Whoever would be chief among you, let him be your...what?...your servant." Treat them with the right attitude, verse 9, give up threatening. Don't yell at your employees, don't intimidate them. Don't verbally abuse them. Don't threaten them. A Spirit-controlled, Spirit-filled employer is gentle, never abusive, never threatening. Threats have no value. Use encouragement. Use reward. Use those things that stimulate the Christian's noble intent.

Why do that? Why all of this? Again the same motivation, end of verse 9, "Knowing that both their master and yours...so here we know these are Christians in this relationship...that both their master and yours is in heaven." What does that mean? He's watching and He's the final authority. You are serving for divine evaluation and God is not impressed with your accomplishments. He's not particularly impressed with your power. He's impressed with your submission to the needs of your employees. And there is no partiality with Him. All earthly distinctions are leveled in the presence of the Lord. All He's interested in is how you treat each other. Do you as an employer seek their best? Do you set aside any intimidation, threatening? Do you recognize that by serving them you're serving Christ, as if they were Christ? Everybody is going to give an account. And you may be a leader in a company, you may be an employer, you may be the boss, and you may think that's a secular environment. It's not. It's your spiritual service. Live in such a way that you adorn the teaching about God as a saving God. Show the evidence of God having transformed your life in the way you treat your employees.

Pretty practical stuff, isn't it? So go to work tomorrow, whatever you do, with this in mind and heart. Let's pray.

Father, we are the first to acknowledge that the standard is so high and sometimes it's what we do is a little monotonous and sometimes it's stressful because there are so many relationships around us with things that we find irritating and challenging. And that's why we plead with you to be gracious unto us that we might know the fullness of Your Spirit, that we might overcome these debilitating human things. Father, I pray for the filling of the Spirit in this congregation so that they may go out speaking to themselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord that they may bring into the work place a fullness of joy so that they may in everything be giving thanks to You, so that they may by the energy of the Spirit of God have an attitude of submission, the attitude of servant that says I just want to serve You because I consider you better than me, and thereby may they adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. May they demonstrate to everybody around the saving power of Jesus Christ. I pray that for those who work and those who are employees and those who employ them as well. May Christ be honored in the work place, may Christians set the pace and set the tone. Father, we thank You for those who do and therefore honor You, whether they're employers and bosses are believers or not, we thank You for those who are faithful to do that. May we remember, Lord, that all our work is sacred, everything

we do is service to You and gives us the opportunity to manifest Your great power in our lives. Make us all testimonies for Your glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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