

Working for Benefits that are Out of this World (Ephesians 6:5-9)

God created work as a good, pleasant, productive activity. "Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). But when sin entered the world, part of the curse of the Fall entailed the frustrations in work: "Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you. And you will eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your face."

If I were to take a survey, most of you would probably say your job is a curse, or at least your boss is.

Yet, for the believer who is seeking to please God, work does not have to be a curse, but rather the potential of a benefit. For the believer a 180-degree paradigm shift has taken place. According to the passage before us in our textual study of Ephesians, we can look beyond the earthly employment compensation package and see what is most important, our heavenly reward. We can look through our ranting, unappreciative foreman and see who we really serve, the gracious and all-knowing Christ who is our heavenly Lord. Here's what I want you to see most vividly from Scripture:

**God is actually our boss,
and if we work like He wants us to,
our benefits will be out of this world.**

A. Employee, how does God want you to work? (6:5-8)

⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

1. Obediently ("Slaves, obey your earthly masters")

The first word we must address in this paragraph is the word, "slaves." Slavery was a common work arrangement in Ephesus of the First Century. It is estimated that there the Roman Empire had around 60 million people, or about 1/3 of the adult population, in slavery. I'm sure we would hate to be a slave, especially because of the lack of freedom to do what we want to do. But because slavery was so common and slaves held many professional positions requiring skill, the average day of the slave may not have been too different than the routine

of employees today. It is certainly not a stretch for us to take what is told to "slaves" in 6:5-8 and apply it to those of us who work for someone else. For anyone who works for a paycheck—contractors, teachers, secretaries, tellers, waiters, or salesmen.

In verse 5, "slave" or "employees" are commanded to obey their "masters" or "employers." Now I want you to notice that this instruction is flowing out of a larger context. This command is part of a section of material that began back in Ephesians 5:21 with this title covering the whole section: *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."*

Then, Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit applies this command, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," to three specific areas of life: wives in relation to the headship of their husbands, 5:22-33, children in relation to their parents, 6:1-4, and employees in relation to their employers, 6:5-9. In each case—wives, children, employees—are to submit or obey. And in each case, there are pointed directives also to those who are in authority—husbands, fathers, and employers.

But in each case, the respect given by wives, children, and employees reflects their respect for the Lord. In the paragraph before us, 6:5-9, we see that this obedience by the employee is "as you would obey Christ" (vs. 5), "like slaves of Christ" (vs. 6), and "as if you were serving the Lord" (vs. 7)

In other words, when we are on the job, we are to do what our boss tells us to do. Of course, there is the same caveat here that we mentioned in previous sermons about the submission of wives and obedience of children. The obedience command is cancelled if the one in authority requires the breaking of God's laws. To steal, cheat, lie, be immoral, embezzle, fudge on DEQ reports, overstate expenses, or understate income. If a boss requires such a performance in your job, you have some choices—appeal to the boss for a righteous alternative, appeal to your boss' boss for a righteous alternative, request a transfer, or quit.

Most of the time in most of our jobs, though, obedience to our employer doesn't offend our conscience. It just offends our laziness. I heard of a man applying for a job. The manager reviewing the application said, "I'm sorry I can't hire you, but there isn't enough work to keep you busy." The applicant replied, "You'd be surprised how little it takes."

2. Respectfully (*"with respect and fear"*)

The same word "fear" (phobuo) is used in 5:21 for the "fear or reverence we all should have for Christ" and in 5:33 for the "fear or reverence wives should

have for their husbands." In the same way, employees are to "fear" their boss, not quaking before them but in an attitudinal respect.

When it comes to the attitude of respect, perhaps a distinction is needed between respecting the person's character and respecting the person's position. When it comes to respecting our supervisor, we may not be able to respect their behavior or morals, but we can and should respect the position of authority God has allowed them to have over you.

By being respectful to our employer, we win respect not only for ourselves, but for the name of God. Here's how 1 Timothy 6:1 states this outcome: *"All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered."*

3. Wholeheartedly (*"not just to win their favor when their eye is on you"*)

This adverb "wholeheartedly" is a word I chose to sum up how we should work from all these phrases in verses 5 and 6:

- sincerity of your heart (vs. 5)
- not just to win their favor when their eye is on you (vs. 6)
- doing the will of God from your heart (vs. 6)

We should work hard all the time, not just when we are being watched by an earthly supervisor. A retired man became interested in the construction of an addition to a shopping mall. Observing the activity regularly, he was especially impressed by the conscientious operator of a large piece of equipment. The day finally came when this retired man had a chance to tell the worker how much he'd enjoyed watching his scrupulous and energetic work. Looking astonished, the equipment operator replied, "You mean, you're not the supervisor?"

How about you? Do you work diligently all the time? Or when the supervisor is out to lunch do you surf the web, gab at the water cooler, or make personal phone calls? You do? Well, are you going to change this week?

4. Expectantly (*"Because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does."*)

It's easy to get discouraged when we compare our job perks with others. We find out someone else belongs to PERS and can retire with better pension than us, or discover another worker gets full medical/dental without the \$1,000 deductible your company demands. It's easy for us to look at our own benefits and grumble or become discontent, isn't it?

But this passage is such an encouragement. If you are not fully or appropriately compensated here in this world, God sees and keeps a record. He is

the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-loving CPA. And see here what he promises, "The Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does."

As we work obediently, respectfully, wholeheartedly, and expectantly the Lord will make good on all the missed perks down here. God's benefits package is out of this world.

What if you have people under you in the company? Some of you may be both employee and employer—middle management—having supervision over some while also answering to someone above you. As we come to verse 9, we find instructions for anyone who has workers under their supervision.

B. Employer, how does God want you to supervise? (6:9)

⁹And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

1. With the Golden Rule ("treat your slaves in the same way")

Here is the Golden Rule in action. "And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31). Employers are to treat their employees as they would want their employees to treat them. If you employers want respect, you should show respect. If you want honesty, you should be honest. If you want pleasantness, you should be pleasant. If want to be appreciated, you should express appreciation. By the way, how long has it been since you have expressed appreciation in either direction—from supervisor to employee or from employee to supervisor? A hand-written note for a specific deed or characteristic goes a long way toward making the work environment healthier.

If you don't want others to put unreasonable demands of work production on you, don't assign such burdens to others. By doing so, you might get more done for the company, but you also might be developing a workaholic and/or destroying a man's family.

One child's father kept bringing office work home just about every night. Finally his first grade son asked him why he always had to work and didn't have time to play with him. The father explained that he had so much work he couldn't finish it all during the day. The boy, having had exposure to grade school, replied, "In that case, why doesn't you boss put you in a slower group?"

2. With sensitivity ("do not threaten them")

Employers are also told to give up threats. There is a lot of power that comes with your supervisory position. Don't abuse it by threatening. Studies of

business productivity confirm businesses flourish when employees see themselves secure as part of the team instead of threatened with termination for one more mistake. Perhaps this is why Starbucks refers to their employees as "partners" and Disneyland employees as "cast members." Starbucks and Disney want their employees to see themselves as invested in the whole operation, not just a cog in the wheel or a drone in the hive.

For 10 years my primary employment was doing insurance adjusting, working for two different bosses during that span of time. When I say "different bosses" I mean they were very different. One boss led by criticism of mistakes; the other by commendation of achievements. I found out from that experience I work harder chasing the bone of praise than running from the rolled up newspaper of criticism. How about you? If you are like me, your supervisor will be more effective by "giving up threatening" while looking for positive reinforcements.

So if you are fortunate enough to be the boss—either of a whole company or of one small division within a department—give a lot of thought to how you can follow this practical Scripture in your workplace. How can you treat your employees with the Golden Rule and with sensitivity?

3. With humility (*"both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him"*)

Finally, those in supervision are reminded to lead with humility. You might think you are high and mighty because you're the boss. But you're really not. "You have a Master in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."

Donald Trump has come into our living rooms the last couple years as the big kahuna of "The Apprentice." Although I like The Don, it is so apparent his ego is bigger than even his hairstyle. He loves hearing the aspiring apprentices laud his glory and listen to his wisdom. But, as with any rich and powerful man down here, Donald Trump is in danger of thinking his influence will continue in the hereafter.

As the rich man and Lazarus found, in the hereafter positions can be switched. Those who have been humbled here may be exalted there. And those who have been exalted and revered here, may be discredited there. Any position of authority loaned to you here must be held with humility, seeing it as a stewardship from the Master of All who is in heaven.

I don't know the spiritual state of Donald Trump's relationship to Christ. But unless Donald Trump at some point in his life confesses his sin and turns to the Lord, he will be bankrupt before God. All the Lear jets, golf courses, and Trump

Towers will not impress God. In fact, unless The Donald Repents, at the Great White Throne, he will hear the words from The Master, "You're fired....literally."

Does being a believer make a difference? Of course it does in our eternal destiny. But it makes a transformational difference right now too. In how we live in marriage, how we parent our children, how we await that surgery, how we work in the business market place. Let's do our work this week differently because Christ is our Master.