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Christ-Centered Serving and Leading

Ephesians 6:5-9

PowerPoint Presentation: None

Keywords: Employment, Labor, Work, Servants, Masters, Work Ethic

SermonAudio blurb: none

I. Introduction.

- A. Read passage.
- B. Remind them of the purpose of Ephesians and how it is written like an ancient drama.
 1. Ephesians 1:22 with 3:10 — the victory of God and the display of that victory through and in the Church.
 2. Chapters 4-6 the Church is now told how they play out their part in this drama before a watching, defeated enemy.
 3. Chapter 5 and 6 pick up three major aspects of every human's existence, marriage, children, and work. Paul is giving us our walking orders on how to conduct ourselves in such a unique way that reflects our hope in what is to come rather than what is now.
 4. It is important to understand that chapters 4-6 speak of a lifestyle and value system that will not make sense to those who are not Christians. In many ways there will be lip-service given on truth-telling and grace-giving speech and faithful marriages but only to a point. Paul is telling us to live a rebellious lifestyle.
- C. Today we come to the world of labor and employment.
 1. Our passage speaks of this through the relationship between the slave and the master. This was the typical work relationship in that day, and in many parts of our world today it still is.
 2. Read selected parts from Hoehner, pp 801-804.
 3. Some will seek to ignore these instructions because they speak to slave and master relationships rather than employee and employer. However I think this is unwise for the following reasons:
 - a. First, understand that slavery relationships were the normal economic force in that day. You did not have the employee-

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employer relationship that we have today. If Paul were writing today in the Western world the terms would be different.

- b. Second, slavery came in many shapes and in many situations they would mirror very closely our model in America.
 - c. Thirdly, in a cross-reference in 1 Peter 2:18 we read, “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect. . . .” That term for servants is a much broader term that can include slaves but also paid servants.
 - d. Finally, there is a bigger issue going on than merely the idea of slavery. A key term used by the apostles to describe themselves and believers in general is *doulos*, which simply means “slave.” We are slaves to Christ and slaves to righteousness.
 - (1) His point in this passage is to have both the master and the slave understand that there was a greater Master whom they serve.
 - (2) So it is with you and I. We may be in a position of authority or not, but we all are actually in a position of slavery to Jesus Christ and we are to act as such.
- D. What should stand out for you as we go through this text today is how very Christ-centered it is. May we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

II. Duties of The Christ-Centered Employee.

- A. The command is simple and direct: Obey (5a).
 - 1. Paul picks up with the weaker of the two relationships in the same way he did with wife and husbands and children and fathers. All of this is subsumed under the command to be filled with the Spirit in 5:18 and the idea of submitting to one another in 5:21.
 - 2. But what is meant by the phrase “be obedient?” All sorts of opportunity for each of us to work on rationalizing that word away.
 - 3. Well Paul gives us five phrases that describe that obedience and once we get through you will have a very Christ-centered, other-age-thinking, perception of obedience in the workplace.
 - 4. But before we look at them I want to summarize in one sentence what the term “obedient” means: “Listen carefully and the do fully” Both are necessary for obedience to occur.

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5. First, it is done in fear and trembling.

B. Five descriptions of how Spirit-filled obedience looks and functions:

- a. Interesting phrase that is unique to Paul's writings in the New Testament.
- b. However in the Old Testament it is used primarily to speak of the kind of fear humans were to have in the presence of God or when they see His mighty works.
- c. What is meant here? It is simply that you as an employee recognize that you are in a subordinate or weak position and therefore act accordingly.
- d. There should not be a cockiness or over familiarity with a master. You recognize that he has tremendous authority over you. Nor should there be disdain and mocking. The godly Christian is not at the water cooler or break room partaking in boss bashing and gossip.
- e. Add to this that at the foundation of all of this is that we are first and foremost slaves of Christ and it helps you see how this is fitting and proper.
- f. In that time fear was one of the huge weapons the master used against his slaves. So slaves understood that sort of fear, but Jesus changed that for them and now, as slaves to Christ they were to serve their earthly master with a godly, God-honoring fear.
- g. Also some would have had Christian masters and the temptation would be to become overly familiar or to use that Christian relationship to your advantage. To these situations Paul makes it very clear that the proper posture first of all is fear and trembling. High respect would be another way to put that.

2. Second, with a sincere heart (5b).

- a. Here again we have a word that only Paul uses.
- b. Notice where this sincerity was to be found, in the heart. Remember that the heart is the center of a person. From it everything else flows.
- c. Now connect this idea back with the command to obey and things get interesting. You and I cannot be guided by false, two-faced, hypocritical motives in our work. We must battle against those.

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- d. When we contemplate our job and those over us we are to settle it in our mind to wholeheartedly embrace it. No fake respect.
 - e. Our mind set ought to be straightforward. No type of division between the quality of our work and the heart attitude of the one doing it.
 - f. But what about those really bad bosses? Surely we are able to criticize or complain about them.
 - (1) 1 Peter 2:18ff clears that up for us.
 - (2) Does this mean you must just grin and bear it? Fortunately for you no it doesn't. Because you are an employee you would be able to look for a different place and person to work for. But for the slave, yes, that is what God is saying.
 - (3) Again the gospel changes everything for a person. It is not merely the promise of forgiveness of sin, it is the decision to take up the shame of the Cross and follow your Lord.
3. Third, your obedience to your early boss is to be as to Jesus (5c).
- a. Some wrongly think that this means that the master in some way is representative of Jesus Christ but that is not really the point. Rather almost the exact opposite is the point.
 - b. You must train your mind/heart to stop factoring in your earthly boss and instead basically replace him with Christ. This is a way you learn to walk and work in a manner that is worthy of the new calling you have in Christ.
 - c. This means you work, whatever that work is, heartily as for the Lord rather than for men (Colossians 3:23).
 - d. You again can see how radical this call is. It is utterly counter to anything your unsaved friend or co-worker is doing. The motivation is driven by understanding your relationship with Jesus Christ your Lord.
 - e. This also tears down another major fallacy in our thinking, that there is secular and spiritual.
 - (1) "That is church but this is business" is a thought pattern that must be abolished from our minds.

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- (2) We must see that our workplace is a holy place and a holy calling as we serve our Lord. That pile of laundry you do is serving your Lord. That mind-numbing report or data on your computer is how Christ is calling you today to serve Him.
 - (3) Because of what Jesus has done in buying you out of slavery to sin and into slavery to Him you are able to now stop making your job an idol and turn it into daily worship.
4. Fourth, your obedience is not as men-pleasers but God-pleasers (6).
- a. Here we get even more blatant as Paul dismantles the typical way we approach work and those who are over us. We have many terms for what Paul describes and many of us have participated in these mind sets. Eye-pleasing and people-pleasing.
 - b. They are traps that turn your labor and your job into idols. You become distracted from your central task, which is to be pleasing to God in your labors.
 - (1) Think of how you have worked your tail end off simply in the hopes to be noticed and get that promotion or praise.
 - (2) How do you work and comport yourself when the boss is away as compared to when he or she is nearby?
 - (3) Paul says that a blood-bought slave of Jesus Christ ought not be this way.
 - c. But understand that this is a mind set, an attitude of the heart more than action.
 - (1) A man-pleaser and a God-pleaser may look quite similar. Even their words might be the same. Both will likely do excellent work.
 - (2) But their motivations will be vastly different.
 - (3) And because their motivations are so different the humble, faithful Christian will ultimately look different as well.
 - (4) Your work is to be excellent work because of who your master is. Your diligence is to be truly diligent and faithful at all times. Your integrity is to be spotless because of the Holy One you represent and labor for.

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- (5) So this is not a call to not strive for excellence but to properly strive for proper excellence.
 - d. This means that every day you wake up into whatever circumstances you find yourself in and you have choices that you will make from your heart in how you will approach that day.
 - e. Do your work ethics reflect the values of this age or the next?
- 5. Fifth, your obedience is to be do in a spirit of enthusiasm (7).
 - a. The term for “good will” speaks of zeal and eagerness.
 - b. This simply means that you approach your day and the tasks and demands with the right spirit.
 - c. Again you are to view your reactions and responses at work with a wholehearted work ethic. You should be the best worker, the most sincere, the most faithful. This doesn’t mean you will produce the most, but rather that you will labor the best.
- C. From here Paul why he is writing all of this to the slave in verse 8,
 - 1. It centers around benefit and reward, which is usually why most people work. They are looking for something more than mere existence.
 - 2. The promise here is rather staggering. It is simply this, that you cannot lose out on anything in reality if you take up Paul’s commands regarding your and your work.
 - a. The way things work too often in your job is that you work hard with perhaps a team and somehow you get no credit for it.
 - b. Perhaps you have striven for a promotion and competed hard but fairly and properly and lost out. And there you face very real temptations. Bitterness, slacking off, revenge and a host of other thoughts come your way.
 - c. This is where theft arises when you figure you will get “yours” one way or another.
 - d. But what we have here is a great word of encouragement to the faithful slave of Christ. You will be properly and truly rewarded.
 - 3. When?
 - a. The answer is in the end when we stand before Him to receive our reward in how we conducted ourselves here and now.

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- b. This is what my old professor would call “ethical eschatology.” And it is important to note this because the vast majority of teachings regarding the final days and the return of Jesus Christ involve how then we are to live in light of that.
- c. Matthew 6:1ff.
 - (1) It is like our investing in eternity in Matthew 6:19ff. The only treasure we lose is that which we keep here and now. All invested in eternal things is ours forever.
 - (2) Every lost raise or promotion in spite of faithfulness and diligence is never lost beloved. It is to be rewarded in eternity.
 - (3) The only reward we lose out on is that which comes because we do not obey with a good heart as before our Lord.
- 4. There is also the emphasis upon individuals in this passage.
 - a. ESV doesn’t really bring that out unfortunately with its vaguer “anyone.”
 - b. Notice that “whatever good thing” that you do, “each one” of you is seen and noted by Jesus. And He promises you will receive back from Him reward.
 - c. But the opposite is true as well as we see in the parallel passage in Colossians 2:24-25.
 - (1) Some will suffer loss in reward because they decided it was not enough just to faithfully serve Jesus Christ.
 - (2) They decided they were going to go for it now and do whatever was needed to make it. Unfortunately for them Proverbs 23:4-5 too often happens, “do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.”

III. Duties of The Christ-Centered Boss.

- A. Again note that Paul is not making a statement one way or another regarding slavery here. One would expect him to say, “Masters, free your slaves!” But he doesn’t.
- B. Instead he instructs them on how they were to act as Christians before their slaves.

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1. It is important to realize that this is an utterly shocking word he gives to masters. It is completely counter-cultural in every way.
 2. Slaves were normally viewed as enemies and the master was wise to rule over them with a strong and hard hand.
- C. Paul gives the Christian masters two instructions.
1. First he tells them to do the same things to them. The question is what exactly does this mean?
 - a. Some have taught this is Paul simply telling them to treat their slaves as they themselves would want to be treated. Some even go so far as to say that the master was to serve the slave and obey the slave.
 - b. However it is better to see that this is referring to them viewing and acting toward their slaves with integrity, faithfulness and good will in like manner. This fits with the Colossians passage where they are commanded to grant to their slaves justice and fairness.
 - c. This master is to be the kind who becomes beloved by his slaves. Seneca, a famous philosopher of old says that there are some slave masters who are so noble that the slaves themselves willing offer themselves to be killed in the place of the master.
 - d. In our day it means you don't view your employees as those who merely are tools to be used and misused.
 - e. It means you see them as valued people who are image-bearers of your Lord.
 - f. It means your speech patterns and your business solutions take their well-being into consideration.
 - g. It means you destroy the "us versus them" mind set that some bosses have.
 2. Second, Paul removes the major weapon of threats of violence.
 - a. Slaves often worked in such conditions that they were never knowing when violence would come upon them.
 - b. Notice that this command is not qualified in any way. It is simply something that is not acceptable for the master.

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- c. This does not mean that proper discipline for wrong doing was not allowed. It does mean that using your position and power to threaten and intimidate is never acceptable.
 - d. Again realize how this would look to your friends and neighbors. Your approach to your slaves would be in stark contrast to those who do not know Christ.
 - e. And then realize how this prepares opportunities for the gospel as you speak to both unsaved slaves and other slave masters as to the true motivations you possess.
- D. Paul then gives them the reasoning behind these instructions.
- 1. And that motivation is that you have a heavenly Master who is also your believing slaves Master and He judges things with no partiality.
 - 2. That means that just because you are an earthly master that somehow He will treat you differently. He won't. He will judge you by how your ordered your life and actions under His Lordship.
 - 3. He will look at your slaves, of whom you had responsibility to oversee in a manner consistent with the name of Christ, and judge you as you treated them.
 - 4. Again, it is looking past the short term gain of this age and the eternal reward or loss of the next age.

IV. Conclusion.

- A. Beloved, work so often becomes our identity but it ought not define you. Christ and being a Christian must be your identity. And that then is to reflect itself in your labors; wherever and however you find them.
- B. If you are in a tough situation right now. It may be cutthroat or just soul-sucking, as a Christian do not despair. And do not let it tempt you to justify disobeying these commands by Paul.
- C. No matter how low you find yourself in your job task. No matter how demeaning it might be, it will never be lower than the labor of Christ bearing our sin upon himself.
- D. And for you who are in authority. Make certain that you reflect Christ to your people. Make sure that you understand that you too are a slave and your Master shall judge you.
- E. Do not be a man-pleaser and do not seek your own fame. It is the Lord to whom you will ultimately be pointing to.

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- F. Recommend www.theologyofwork.org for helpful resources.

Community Group Questions

1. From Paul's perspective why is all work ultimately not futile for the Christian?
2. What are ways you worship in your work? And how often do you really see it that way? Finally, in light of work being worship where do our emotions come into play with worship?
3. What was most challenging for you in this sermon and what new thing did you learn?