


Ephesians

God's Design for the Workplace
Ephesians 6:5-9

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Review the similarities and differences between slavery in the first century Greco-Roman world and slavery as it was practiced in Colonial America (see the [Sermon Summary](#)). What do you learn?

The key **moral** questions regarding slavery during biblical times were: (1) "Was it voluntary?" and, (2) "How were slaves treated?" (**American** slavery **failed** the morality test on **both** of those criteria.) Can you envision **any** circumstances in which **biblical** slavery **could** have been "moral"? If so, how?

Bringing it into the 21st century, by those two criteria, does **your** work environment qualify as "moral"?

If your answer is "yes", what guidance does today's sermon give you? If not, what can you do?

- Read 1 Peter 2:18–20. What guidance is given to those whose bosses are "good and gentle"?
What guidance is given to those whose bosses are "unreasonable"?
In light of Ephesians 6:7-8, how do you explain the guidance to workers in 1 Peter 2:18?
- Read Ephesians 6:9. What **two** commands does Paul have for **employers**? (See the first half of the verse.)
What **rationale** does Paul give for those commands? (See the second half of the verse.)
From the following passages, what do we learn about partiality?

Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34 & 1 Peter 1:17 _____

Mark 12:14; Jude 16 & Galatians 2:6 _____

Colossians 3:23-25 _____

Sermon Summary

The word “servants” in Ephesians 6.5-9 unquestionably refers to Christian slaves, but as I will explain in a moment, we may certainly apply these principles to Christian employees today. Slavery always has been a global phenomenon. But our focus today is on slavery as it existed in the first century Greco-Roman world. A kind of terrible idleness had fallen on the citizens of Rome. Roman citizens came to think that it was beneath their dignity to work and consequently, nearly all work was done by slaves. It has been estimated that in Paul’s day there were some 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. Slaves served in nearly every field. In addition to farmhands, they served as doctors, teachers, secretaries and accountants. Slavery was an accepted institution in the ancient world—even by intellectuals. For example, Aristotle could not even contemplate a friendship between slave and slave-owner, for, he said “A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave”. As a mere “tool”, a master could treat a slave virtually however he pleased. Consequently, there are accounts of terrible atrocities, especially from the pre-Christian era. The Roman statesman Cato said, “Old slaves should be thrown on a dump, and when a slave is ill do not feed him anything. It is not worth your money. Take sick slaves and throw them away because they are nothing but inefficient tools.” Slaves were sometimes whipped, mutilated, or even killed, even for trivial offenses such as breaking a drinking goblet.

However this kind of barbaric treatment of slaves wasn’t universal. Oftentimes there was affection and loyalty shared between master and slave. Slaves weren’t always treated badly. Although laws protecting slaves were slow to be enacted, their ill treatment was often restrained by financial considerations and public opinion. And so while slavery was degrading in the Roman Empire, it was not the same as the slavery that existed in the United States. First of all, skin color had nothing to do with it. Slaves came from various nations and oftentimes their appearance was no different from those who were free. Second, during lean times, free persons sometimes voluntarily sold themselves into slavery knowing that they would be provided for. Third, slaves in the Greco-Roman world often were highly trained and educated. Some were professors, physicians or lawyers. Finally, in some instances, first century slaves could eventually become free and even become Roman citizens. So, as we read Paul’s words to Christian slaves, we need to enter into the ancient context in which Paul lived.

Although the Scriptures already outlawed involuntary enslavement and the cruel treatment of any slave (Exodus 21:16, 26-27), the advance of the Christian faith eventually led to the abolition of slavery. This happened through a focus on the transformation of individuals, who in turn influenced society. Paul was concerned with the eternal perspective on slavery. To advocate the direct, immediate abolition of slavery would have brought the wrath of Rome on believers. Finally, an emphasis on the immediate abolition of slavery likely would have resulted in many false conversions—slaves claiming Christianity simply to liberate themselves socially and economically. Christianity promises not a release from our circumstances but rather the power to endure. The spread of Christianity eventually contributed to the abolition of slavery and child labor, to the elevation of women and the care of the needy by promoting the truth that all are created in God’s image and therefore have dignity and worth. Paul’s words in Ephesians 6 sowed the seeds of the eventual abolition of slavery.

Since slavery no longer exists in our context, we can extract timeless principles which apply to Christian employers and employees today. **Paul gives three reasons why Christians should be exemplary employees.** First of all, **we are really serving Christ** (v. 5). Who is in authority over us at work shouldn’t make any difference in how we conduct ourselves. We should pursue excellence at work simply because **it is the right thing to do**. It is God’s will that we work conscientiously and seek to do a good job (v. 6). We work just as hard when the boss is away as when they are watching us. We seek to be great employees because our **faithfulness at work will be rewarded by God** (v. 8). The Bible doesn’t distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Whatever your earthly job, you can do for God’s glory. Masters (employers) receive the same admonitions (v. 9), and the warning that they too have a Master in heaven.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

*"Five Question Bible Study" (see page below) is a simple way to study any topic.
Let's use it to learn about God's design for the workplace...*

Monday— Read Proverbs 28:20. What does an employer look for in an employee?

Tuesday— Read Ecclesiastes 5:12. Is your paycheck the only reward for your labors?

Wednesday— Read Deuteronomy 8:12–14, 17-18. From where does wealth come?

Thursday— Read Proverbs 27:23-27. How can you succeed as a business owner?

Friday— Read Proverbs 6:6–11. How can you ruin your chances of advancement at work?

Saturday— Read Proverbs 22:29 & 1 Kings 11:28. How can you advance in the workplace?

Five Question Bible Study

Bible Text: _____ Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]