

Ephesians 6:5-9 — How Does Jesus Change The Way I Work?

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Good morning CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. As a church, we are studying our way through the book of Ephesians. We are close to the end of the book. So far, we learned how God has blessed us through Jesus. We are the most blessed being in all of God's creation because we are adopted in God's family as brothers and sisters of Jesus.

In the second half of Ephesians, Paul taught us how we live because of who we are. We are to live a different lifestyle because of our new identities in Jesus.

In the portion of Ephesians we are studying today, Paul talked about how Jesus changes our everyday lives. He talked about how Jesus changes the way a husband and wife relate to one another in marriage. Last week, we saw how Christ changes our home life. Jesus gives children a desire to obey and honor their parents. He gives parents the desire to love their children, not provoke them to anger. Today, we see how Christ changes work life and the relationship between employees and employers. This is a big topic. We have a lot to cover so let's jump right in. We pick up in Ephesians 6:5.

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ... Ephesians 6:5 (ESV)

The NIV clarifies what a bondservant is. That is a slave.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Ephesians 6:5 (NIV)

This immediately raises a question we need to deal with. Slavery. We consider slavery one of the great evils of history. The Bible never comes out and calls slavery sin. Why not? Why doesn't the Bible condemn the evils of slavery? We need to answer that question before we go any farther into our study. To help us understand why the Bible doesn't condemn slavery outright, I will first explain slavery in America, then compare American slavery to slavery in the ancient world.

What does the Bible teach about slavery?

Slavery in America

Most of us are acquainted with slavery and the way it was practiced in our country. Men, women and children were ripped from their homes in the middle of the night from the continent of Africa. They were whipped and beaten into submission. Husbands, wives, and children were torn apart never to see one another again. People were packed into the holds of ships with almost no space to breath. The situation that was worse than what was endured by most animals. Slaves were abused and mistreated. Slavery was dark and very wicked.

In America, slavery was based on race. It lasted a lifetime. It was wrong. The Bible calls the slavery of American history one of the most heinous forms of sin.

...for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine... 1 Timothy 1:10 (NIV)

Slavery in the ancient world

Slavery in the ancient world was different from the way it was practiced in our country. Let's begin with the similarities. In the ancient world, slaves were considered property. They could be beaten, mutilated and mistreated. In the ancient world slaves had no rights. There are stories of horrendous treatment of slaves by their masters in the ancient world. Augustus once crucified one of his slaves because he accidentally killed Augustus' pet quail. Another slave owner named Polio attempted to throw a clumsy slave into a pod of sea lamprey for accidentally breaking a crystal goblet. Slavery could be very cruel, but by the time of Christ, slaves were typically treated in a humane way.

Unlike America, in the ancient world, slavery was not a racial issue. There were slaves of all races and even of your own race. Slavery was the way most of the labor force in the ancient world functioned. Upward of a third of the population in major cities, such as Ephesus, were slaves.

Slaves even owned slaves. Slavery was not a lifelong commitment. Most slaves were freed by the age of 30. When they were freed, they were typically given money and resources to start lives of their own. If a slave saved money, he or she could buy freedom from their master. Slavery in the ancient world had many similarities to joining the military after high school. It was a period of indentured servitude.

In the ancient world, infanticide was the popular way to take care of unwanted children. Last week, we learned that at birth, children were placed at the feet of their father and if he walked away, children were put in a field to be

exposed. Sometimes those children were eaten by wild animals; sometimes the worst type of perverts picked them up; sometimes lower class Roman citizens found them, saved them and raised them to be their slaves. Your slavery was an exchange for saving your life. Christians typically handled children they found exposed differently. They typically adopted them and didn't enslave them.

In the ancient world, if you went broke, you couldn't file chapter 11. To handle your debt, you enslaved yourself to your creditor to work until your debt was paid. That wasn't a bad idea. It is better than sitting in jail or leaving your creditors high and dry. Many of the poor in the ancient world sold themselves into slavery. There was no welfare system to live off so you could sit in your living room watching television while the government paid your bills. If you couldn't make ends meet, selling yourself into slavery usually guaranteed a much better life than begging on the street. I say all this so you know slavery in the ancient world was not as evil as it may appear.

Why doesn't the Bible condemn slavery?

The Bible does not condemn slavery outright because it was part of society. The way ancient slavery was practiced meant it was not necessarily an evil institution. The Bible is primarily concerned with the evil of our hearts, forgiveness of our sins and getting new hearts from Christ. The evil heart is what makes any socio-economic institution bad.

While the Bible doesn't condemn slavery, it does knock down the pillars which slavery is built on.

- In 1 Corinthians 7:21 Paul told the Corinthians that if they are slaves and they can get their freedom, they should gain freedom, not stay as a slave.
- The Bible tells us to love our neighbor, not to own our neighbor.
- We are to treat others like we would want to be treated. Ripping people out of bed in the middle of the night, stuffing them into the cargo hold of a ship and sailing them to another country to work for nothing until they die doesn't fit the bill of treating others the way you would like to be treated.
- We are told to be imitators of Christ. Christ lived in a day when slavery was common but Jesus never had slaves. Jesus lived like a servant, like a slave. In John 13, he washed his disciples' feet. That was the job of the lowest slave in a house.
- The entire book of Philemon is Paul writing a letter to Philemon telling him to take back his runaway slave who was no longer a slave but was now Philemon's brother in Christ and should be treated as a brother, not a slave.

I say this because it is very important to understand why the Bible doesn't condemn slavery outright. Slavery in the ancient world was a form of employment. While our text this morning talks about the relationship between masters and their slaves, if Paul were writing it today, he would just use the terms employees and employers. It is in that direction we will take the rest of our study this. How do Christians honor Christ as employees and employers?

What should be different about a Christian employee?

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ... Ephesians 6:5 (ESV)

Work for my boss like I am working for Christ.

The umbrella everything builds under is that as an employee, we are to obey our boss and work for our boss like you were working for Jesus himself. Christian employees are to be noticeably different. They are to show their boss more respect, have much higher integrity, be more honest and diligent at work than other employees around them. While everybody else is surfing the Internet on company time, as Christians, we are working. While other people are stealing office supplies, we don't take advantage of the company. While others are laughing up a storm at the water cooler in the break room and stretching their coffee break, we are diving into our next project. While others are engaged in office gossip and bickering, we steer clear.

Paul wanted employers to desperately want more Christians in their work force because Christians are to be the best employees anyone can have. They work for their bosses like they are working for Jesus.

Before I became a pastor, I had a number of jobs. I was a computer science undergraduate and one of my jobs was working as an intern for IBM. I shared an office with a guy in his mid-50s. He was a really friendly guy. As I look back on my conversations with him, I don't remember him doing any work. All I remember him for is taking smoke breaks every hour or two at the allotted times. He spent lots of time talking about what he did on the weekend and what he planned to do on his next weekend. Time for another smoke break. While he had seniority, he didn't have productivity. If I was his boss, I would be frustrated with him. If I couldn't change his behavior, I would let him go. He was lazy.

Think back upon the people you work with or the people who work for you. When you think about employees who worked with you or for you, what comes to mind? A hard worker? Someone who does their best? A great attitude? Laziness? Whining? Complaining? What kind of legacy are we leaving through our work?

Treat my boss with respect.

...obey your earthly masters with respect and fear...

Paul's point was that we should respect and fear our boss. The fear he is talking about is not cowering fear but reverence. Don't treat your boss like a peer. He is your boss. He is your livelihood. Don't be disrespectful to your boss in attitude or performance. When your boss asks for something, don't push it off and get it done at the end of the week when it is convenient for your schedule, get it done ASAP so you honor his needs before your own needs. As an employee, we are working for our boss like we are working for Christ. If Christ asks us to do something, we wouldn't wait until Friday at 4 p.m. to start.

What if my boss is a nut case? Many of us have worked for a nut case. Some are just cruel. They make you work long hours on unreasonable projects. They inconvenience you and take personal time away from your family. You come home stressed. You feel like your boss is demanding much more than he or she has a right to demand. Should we work hard for a boss that is a nut case? Shouldn't we try to skate by, put in our time, avoid them and put in a minimum amount of effort?

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 1 Peter 2:18–19 (ESV)

We do our best for our boss even if he or she is a nutcase making unreasonable demands. Our bosses may be unreasonable, but they are our employers. Work as hard as we can for them, because we are ultimately working for Christ.

There may come a time when we need to resign from our positions and work someplace else. That is an option. In the ancient world, it wasn't an option for most slaves. We should be thankful for that option. While we are still working for our nutcase employers, we do our best.

I told you earlier that I worked as a programmer for IBM. I was one of four interns hired by IBM from college. Three were hired to program AS code, which was a new programming language IBM was developing for its main frame databases. I was hired to program SAS, the established robust language it used under contract from another company. IBM planned to phase my job out and build the work load for the other three interns. The problem was that as the work came in, the new AS language was so new it couldn't do most of the requests. The other three interns were kicking their feet up on the desk and I had work piled high. At first, it wasn't much of a problem. I liked the overtime and was paid well. I eventually began burning out.

Then IBM decided to consolidate its two other warehouses into the warehouse I worked at in Pennsylvania. Every department was to send someone to work nights to help stock the warehouse. I understood my job was

getting phased out. Almost everybody else had a family, and I didn't. I was a college wrestler, and almost everyone else in my office was a smoker in desperate need of exercise. Working in the warehouse from midnight-6 a.m., plus attending some college classes during the day, plus doing a little programming during the day plus running cross country pushed me over the edge. With almost no sleep for weeks, I eventually collapsed and slept for two days. I resigned and took a failing grade for my internship.

I look back on that period of my life and now understand that God didn't just want me to get through it, he wanted me to distinguish myself as an employee in it. It was an opportunity for my employer to see that Christians are different.

Have a good attitude at work.

...with sincerity of heart...

When the Bible talks of sincerity of heart, it means purity of heart. It means having a good attitude at work. It is having an attitude that shows it is a privilege to serve. It is a privilege to work. In the future, I want to teach a series on work as worship. The Bible is clear that our Monday to Saturday work is an act of worship. Adam was created to work the ground. As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, our work is part of our worship. Work wasn't originally created to be a burden but it was created to be a joy. It was created to bring satisfaction.

Our attitudes should reflect joy in our work. I know many jobs are not satisfying. I know many jobs are hard. That is why somebody pays us money to do them. If they were easy, we wouldn't get paid. If there are any men here who

have gone unemployed for a period of time, you know it is harder to not have work than to have hard work.

Should I work hard if everyone else is taking their time? I see this in hourly jobs. I see this on manual labor jobs. Why work hard? We are only getting paid minimum wage. As a Christian, we come on the scene trying to work hard because we are not working for minimum wage, we are doing our best because we are serving Christ. People look at us and tell us to slow down. Stretch the job. Make it take longer. You earn more money. If you work too hard, it makes the rest look bad. Should we still work hard even when everybody else doesn't? Yes.

One of my first tech jobs in high school was working for AT&T Technologies in New Jersey. I filled out an application at a temp agency and because I knew the CPM language and understood a word processor called WordStar, I got a call. They wanted me to work at AT&T Technologies as a temp during my spring vacation. They gave me a stack of papers that needed to be typed. I finished it the first day and went home. It didn't take a week. Guess who received a call back next week? Guess who they asked to come in after school and do more typing? Guess who they paid to learn more software? Work hard like you are working for Jesus, when everyone else is taking their time. Let God take care of the results.

Work hard even when the boss isn't looking.

...not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart... Ephesians 6:6 (ESV)

Do you work harder when you are supervised or unsupervised? How many of you work unsupervised jobs? Christians should not need supervision to make sure they are working. Remember, our boss is Jesus. We always do our best for him.

David, my oldest son, worked concrete for the last three summers. I really enjoyed when he came home and told me about his day on the job. When he began, one of the things he couldn't get over was laziness of the workers, until the boss came around. Then everybody kicked into high gear. Once the boss left, everybody went back to using their shovels as a leaning post. That is not the way Christians work. That is just working for eye-service.

What are other ways we can do a job for mere eye-service?

Doing the minimum a job requires versus doing a job right. When Mom and Dad ask you to clean your room, eye-service is simply pushing everything under the bed so your mess can't be seen. Doing the job right is folding your clothes. If a job is worth doing, it's worth doing right, because we are doing it for Jesus, not a paycheck.

Not billing for unproductive hours. My wife's father worked a very low wage job. She grew up with only the bare essentials. One thing that always impressed me about him was when he worked, he only billed for "productive" time. It didn't help his income but I always remember that about him. If someone distracted him while he was working so he wasn't working, he didn't bill for those hours. I think Christ was pleased.

One of the things that really annoys me is laziness, especially among pastors. You need to know that many pastors are notorious for laziness. After all, as I was once told, pastors only work on Sunday.

When I took my first full-time youth pastorate, a neighboring church also hired a new youth pastor and we started around the same time. In the fall, he asked me what I did all day when the kids were in school. He didn't know what to do so he sat in his office and played video games on his computer. I almost strangled him. Do you know the Bible so well that you can get paid to play video games while on the church clock? That youth pastor didn't make it to his second year. I think we know why. He was lazy. He didn't work hard since he didn't have a boss that was looking. Jesus, the real boss, was looking, and he wasn't pleased.

Work hard even if you are passed over for a raise or promotion. This is hard. It is easy to get sour when we are passed over, especially when the raise or promotion we were passed over for is given to someone we feel is less deserving. Remember, we are working for Jesus, not for our bosses.

If my boss is a Christian, don't take advantage of his grace.

Sometimes Christian employees subtly take advantage of their Christian employers. After all, you won't fire a brother or sister in Christ. Sometimes Christian employees get lazy. This is what the Bible says.

Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things. 1 Timothy 6:2 (ESV)

If your boss is a Christian, you shouldn't count on them extending extra grace, they should count on you extending extra work. If Jesus is your ultimate boss, we should work hard out of thankfulness to him for his grace.

Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Titus 2:9–10 (ESV)

Everything about our work should adorn Christ and make the gospel look attractive.

Work hard knowing that Jesus will reward me, even if my boss doesn't.

...rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Ephesians 6:7–8 (ESV)

Many of us do not understand the biblical doctrine of heavenly rewards. The Bible tells us that the only way anyone is in heaven is if they are saved by God's grace through Jesus Christ. It is all a gift. That doesn't mean how we live our lives doesn't matter. The Bible tells us that the lives of Christians will be judged, not for our sins because all of our sins are paid for by Jesus. Our lives will be judged based on how we have lived once we came to Christ, and we will be rewarded for what we have done with our lives from that point forward.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

Paul was talking to Christians. We will be judged based on how we lived. To understand this verse we need some background. The background of this verse is the Isthmian games. They were the precursor to the Olympic games.

After the athletes competed, the judge sat on the judgment seat and gave rewards based on how the athletes competed. He gave out golds, silvers and bronzes. Paul said that one day, we will stand before Christ and he will hand out rewards based on how we ran. Are you running for the gold medal or to just finish the race?

As Christians, the goal of our lives is not to get to heaven. We already have that as a gift from Jesus Christ, and we can never be torn out of his hand. The goal of our life is to be richly reward by Jesus once we get to heaven.

Here is what we need to remember. Jesus will reward us not based upon our status but based upon our faithfulness. There will be many people who were faithful to Christ who served in lower paying jobs because they were not intellectually brilliant but they were good parents to their kids, faithful and loving to their spouses, consistent and sacrificial at work. They will be richly rewarded by Jesus for all the compensation they didn't get on Earth. There will also be those who were well off on Earth, who had lots of money, lots of talents, and lots of power who will not be nearly as rewarded by Christ in heaven because they wasted their talents and their money.

Remember that God will pay us in eternity for our hard work, even if your boss doesn't pay you for your hard work on Earth. As Christians, we will always be rewarded for our work.

How do I honor Christ as an employer?

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. Ephesians 6:9 (ESV)

As employers, how we treat our employees is part of our Christian faith. We are to treat people like Jesus would treat them if he were in our position. He gives employers two pieces of instruction.

Don't motivate with threats.

...stop your threatening...

Paul was talking about motivation. Every employer needs to find a way to motivate his or her employees. Threats and intimidation are not the way we motivate. A former neighbor of mine took over the leadership of a manufacturing facility. As the plant manager, when he arrived, he was given a tour of the facility by a floor manager. The floor manager grabbed an employee during the tour who was working on the assembly line and began berating him, cussing him and telling him he was an idiot — just really nasty motivational techniques. You know what my neighbor, the new plant manager, did? He fired the floor manager on the spot. He said, “We don't motivate employees by threatening and berating.”

How do we motivate our employees? We motivate our employees by treating them like Jesus would. We work hard, like Jesus worked. We make sacrifices for them, like Jesus made sacrifices for us. We love them; we don't want to simply use them.

Are there times we need to have tough talks with an employee? Of course. Are there times we have to set goals and expectations that must be met? Of course. The spirit we do it with makes all the difference. It is not bullying but it is seeing if the job an employee has is a good fit for the way they are shaped.

Don't show favoritism.

...there is no partiality with him.

Playing favorites is easy. In youth sports, on the football teams my kids were a part of, there was a lot of favoritism by the coaches. I know my boys were frustrated by it. As parents, we were frustrated by it but we learned to live with it because I couldn't be a coach. I didn't know a thing about coaching football.

Cindy knows a lot about football. I considered throwing her in with the guys and having her coach so our kids had more playing time. I restrained myself on that one.

Favoritism is frustrating. Favoritism is demotivating.

Conclusion

How does Jesus change the way I work? First, as employees, we work for our bosses like we are working for Christ. We work hard. We have a great attitude. This is the way we honor Jesus. Second, as employers, we don't motivate our employees with threats. We don't use favoritism. We motivate them with the same kind of love that Jesus has for us. A love that motivates us.



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