

SPIRIT-FILLED MARRIAGES, HOMES, AND WORKPLACES:

CHRISTIANS IN THE WORKFORCE

Ephesians 6:5-9

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This passage deals with Christian character at all levels of our activity in our daily lives. While there isn't a one-to-one correlation between the world of the first century and our 21st century world these commands continue to guide Christians today. Christ is Lord and all of our relationships and attitudes should reflect this, regardless of one's socio-economic setting. This, I think, is the bridge that connects the setting of first century Ephesus and twenty first century America. It is right for us to ask, "to whom does this passage apply today?" Yet this is not the most important question. The more pressing question is, "what is the motivation behind the command given to slaves and masters?"

Big Idea: Work with sincere attitudes and conduct in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. What is the responsibility of every Christian Slave? (vv. 5-8)

Every Christian slave is called to obey (cf. Colossians 3:22-25). The word "obey" is from the Greek word ὑπακούω. It simply means "to follow instructions" (BDAG, 1028). It is the same word used for Christian children's responsibility (cf. Colossians 3:20, 22). It has the idea of getting under one's authority.

Obey whom? Slaves are to obey their earthly masters. The KJV, NKJV, and NASB literally render the Greek, "masters according to the flesh." It implies that every Christian has other authorities in their lives, but ultimately one Lord.

How should a Christian slave obey?

- With fear and trembling. This phrase is also found in 1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 7:15; Philippians 2:12. This "phrase has to do with an attitude of due reverence and awe in the presence of God, a godly fear of the believer in view of the final day" (O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 450).
- With a sincere heart. The word "sincere" refers to "personal integrity expressed in word or action" (BDAG, 104; cf. 1 Chronicles 29:17). In our terms, "what you see is what you get." No hypocrisy in your work. The phrase "Here comes the boss, look busy" does not characterize the Christian in the workforce.

How should a Christian slave *not* obey?

- Not by way of eye-service. This word is only found here and Colossians 3:22. "Service that is performed only to make an impression in the owner's presence" (BDAG, 744). Not too long ago 5 eyewitness news ran a story about St. Paul city employees who spent hours and hours a day on break and other non-work related activity. It's scandalous because taxpayers are funding their idleness. They had no idea that their lack of labor would be captured on tape. But let's say for a moment that 5 eyewitness news followed you around. What we learn about your work ethic?

This kind of activity is quintessential hypocrisy such as the prayer of the Pharisee for his earthly observer, not his heavenly Observer in Luke 18:10-12. This is deceit; lying sourced in the father of lies, Satan (John 8:44). You cannot nor should be trusted. People will see this. If they don't, there is One who does and who will give you your just recompense (v. 8).

What is the motivation for a Christian slave's obedience to his master?

- As you would Christ. So a way to view this is to view a command from your boss is to be as if it came from Christ Himself. It may not be given in a Christ-like way, with a Christ-like demeanor, or with Christ-like vocabulary but that is inconsequential to our response. This is the Christian's posture toward government, law enforcement, spiritual leaders, teachers, supervisors, etc. This is our "religious motive" (Eadie, *Ephesians*, 449). There is a direct correlation between obedience on a horizontal level and a vertical level. That is, our obedience to Christ is manifested in our obedience to those in authority over us.
- As servants of Christ. In this sense, the secular and sacred intersect. Whether you're on the assembly line or an assistant manager; flipping burgers or filing paper work, whether your work is menial or managerial, your

sacred religious duties and your secular responsibilities intersect. And what God has joined together let no man put asunder.

- Doing the will of God from the heart. This phrase makes this inescapably applicable to everyone of us. To give glory to God with all that your hand finds is precisely what every one of us is called to do. The word “heart” in this phrase actually translates the Greek word ψυχή, more commonly translated “soul.” It is doubtful that Paul is drawing a sharp distinction between heart and soul. It is more like the word Greek words are used interchangeably. The Apostle Paul is highlighting that this is done from within (Hodge, *Ephesians*, 365; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 421-2; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 809).

2. What is the responsibility of every Christian Master? (v. 9)

Every Christian master is called to extend Christian goodwill (cf. Colossians 4:1).

“Masters” refers to “one who is in charge by virtue of possession” (BDAG, 577; cf. Hodge, *Ephesians*, 361). In the Ephesians social context, the master stands over against the slave (*NIDNTT*, 2:513).

How should a master extend sincere Christian goodwill to his slaves?

“Stop your threatening.” This is a lack of gracious dealings with others. This is heavy-handed oversight. These threatening were real and would mean beatings or even death for slaves in the Greco-Roman world.

What is the Christian master’s motivation for extending sincere Christian goodwill to his slaves?

Both Christian master and Christian slave have the same Master in heaven. Our Master in heaven is not partial.

James refers to the sin of partiality in James 2:9, “But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

Let me make some application to the members of our church in our church in particular and anyone involved in Christian ministry in general. The quality of ministry is contingent on the quality of service of the ministers in an “each one ministry.” Shoddy and foot-dragging work is not how ministry should be conducted. Mediocrity is not something I intend to perpetuate. Why? God deserves better and he calls us to better—whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might and unto the Lord.

Conclusion

So with this sermon we conclude our look at the household code of Ephesians 5:22-6:9. I love the practicality of this section. It helps us to live wisely as Christians in the most mundane spheres: homes, marriages, and workplaces. It is not only good common sense kind of material. In fact, in many ways this instruction goes against conventional wisdom. It is Christian through and through because this can only be accomplished by Spirit-filled believers. Moreover, its motivation is the Lordship of Christ in our lives. If you are doing this, be aware that Satan will seek to thwart your advancement which is why we need instruction on the next section of chapter six.

The *Didache*, or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, is a very early Christian document. It is a document filled with instructions for personal and church life. It begins with a section dealing with two ways. The first is the way of life and the second is the way of death. The way of life is grounded is comprised of Christ’s teachings which should guide the Christian’s conduct. The final part of “the way of life” section has content very similar to our passage. Here’s a portion of what it says, “Do not enjoin anything in your bitterness upon your bondman or maidservant, who hope in the same God, lest ever they shall fear not God who is over both; for he comes not to call according to the outward appearance, but to them whom the Spirit has prepared. And you bondmen shall be subject to your masters as to a type of God, in modesty and fear . . . This is the way of life.”

What Paul and the *Didache* reveal is that Christianity touches every part of our life, including submitting to the authorities in our lives and extending Christian goodwill to those who serve us. Indeed, it is the way of life.