

“Avoiding War at Work”

Ephesians 6:5-9

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It’s Monday, 6 a.m. and your alarm goes off. In an hour you will be dressed, out the door and on your way to another day at work. How do you feel? Well, maybe not so great. First, you may have been sleeping pretty soundly when the alarm went off. Second, if you are like over half of American workers, you really don’t like your job that much. Many folks basically live for weekends and for their three weeks of vacation. Work may be something you endure, not enjoy. There can be various reasons for that, but often a big factor in job dissatisfaction is poor relationships between employers and employees. People don’t usually like their jobs if they don’t like their boss, or if they don’t like the people working under them. That is why you might be happier going to work tomorrow if you know your boss will be out of town for the next two weeks.

Friends, as we have gone through the book of Ephesians over the past six months, we have seen that a person becomes a Christian by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We have also learned that we then become a different person on the inside. That should impact how we live, not just on Sunday mornings, but seven days a week. In recent weeks we have talked about how the Lord expects us to relate to our spouse, children, and parents.

Today we focus on how being a Christian impacts our relationships at work. Our text is Ephesians 6:5-9. I encourage you to turn there in your Bible. This is one of those very practical passages that may hit a little close to home. Yet, if we heed what the Lord is saying, I believe He will help us avoid some situations that can bring a lot of misery to our lives. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would use His word to help us honor Him even.

In our text, the apostle Paul has some instructions for 1st century slaves. **Ephesians 6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ.** Now actually the ESV uses the term “bondservants” instead of “slaves.” That is because there are significant differences between slavery in the 1st century Roman Empire and the slavery with which we are most familiar, the enslavement of African Americans in the southern

U.S. before the Civil War. However, these individuals were not paid servants with Tuesdays and holidays off. “Bondservants” were required to work for their masters and often to do so for their entire lives. Under a simple definition, they were slaves.

“So, Pastor, Dan, why doesn’t the Bible simply condemn slavery here? Why doesn’t Paul say, ‘Slaves rebel against your masters, because they have no right to treat you like property?’” Well, here is a 3-part answer to that question. First, abolishing slavery in the Roman Empire would not necessarily have been humane. Historians estimate there were about 60 million slaves in the empire at that time. Many of those individuals enjoyed better conditions than slaves in other places and at other times, but they were still slaves. It was not any fun.

Yet, life for many in the Roman Empire was not fun. If slavery would have been abolished overnight, life likely would have become more difficult for many of those 60 million people. After the Civil War, many black Americans freed from slavery faced real challenges adjusting to life as free men and women. In the Roman Empire those challenges would have been much greater. Does that mean Roman slavery was a good thing? Not at all. But it does mean that Paul and the other apostles likely realized that emancipation of slaves, was not only an unrealistic goal, but if successful, unintended negative consequences would increase human suffering. There were reasons the early church did not make the abolition of slavery their top priority.

Second, Paul knows there is a bondage more terrible than slavery. During a famine in Ethiopia a few years ago, a pastor there said, “Our people’s souls are more hungry than their stomachs.” Often when we are struck by the obvious physical needs people have, we miss the less obvious, but equally real spiritual needs. Some of those spiritual needs have eternal consequences. I think the New Testament church recognized that slavery was evil and that a lot of things in the Roman Empire were wrong. Yet, their primary concern was to do something about the evil in the human heart, by proclaiming the great news of

Jesus Christ in midst of that far from perfect world.

Third, the Bible does destroy slavery's foundation. Even though that does not attack the institution of slavery directly, it strikes a moral blow against it. In **Galatians 3:28b** Paul declares, "**there is neither slave nor free...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**" All are one and all are equal. Some folks try to discredit Christianity by claiming the Bible condones slavery. Yet, without the New Testament, slavery might very well be a thriving institution today. The abolitionist movement in the United States, Britain, and throughout the world have been led by Christians. William Wilberforce, the British statesman who devoted his career to fighting the slave trade, was an evangelical leader in his country. Yes, many Baptist pastors defended slavery in the American south, but they could only do that by coming up with bizarre interpretations of scripture, such as "the curse of Cain." And they had to ignore the liberty pouring out of the New Testament gospel. Christians who recognize that the Bible teaches all human beings bear God's image and are equal in Christ, have been the leaders in the fight against slavery for centuries.

Okay, let's think about how Paul's words to slaves are also for Christian employees. "Wait a minute, Pastor Dan. Employees are not slaves! What do instructions for slaves who lived almost 2000 years ago have to do with me going to work tomorrow?" Paul is writing to people in a different situation than we have. Yet, if slaves who had no choice about the work they did and who received no compensation were expected to serve whole heartedly, as verse 7 says, then certainly Christian employees should be willing to do the same. If Paul expects 1st century slaves to respect their masters and work with enthusiasm, he would want employees in 2022 to do the same.

Paul insists Christian workers, slaves or employees, should have a new perspective on work. **Ephesians 5:5-7 Slaves, obey our earthly master with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.** As Christians, we need to realize that no matter what our job is, we are really working for Jesus. When

we go to work at Hibb-Tac, Walmart, or the Chisholm School District we are really working for Jesus. Yes, a company or organization is paying our salary, and we likely have some type of supervisor or boss, but we are really working for the Lord. If we keep that in mind, it will help us avoid two mistakes that are sometimes made.

The First mistake is to think that your boss or employer is your ultimate authority. Even if you are a slave, and there is a conflict between what God has said and what our master commands, you should obey God. When you are on the job, and your boss asks you to do something that is morally wrong, you should refuse to do so. That is usually not an easy thing to do. Sermons often make things sound very black and white, but when you get to work you may find yourself in a situation that seems pretty gray. Your boss may not ask you to lie, but he may want you to never mention certain information to any of the customers.

Should you follow his wishes? I don't know. That depends on what that information is. But your priority must be to work in a way that pleases the Lord. Now, many employers value workers who stick to their convictions and insist on being honest. Yet, even if they don't Jesus does, And He is the one who counts.

Knowing you are really working for Jesus Christ also helps avoid the mistake of making your job your primary focus in life. Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonalds, used to say that the three most important things in life were God, and Family, and McDonalds, and that when he got to the office, that order was reversed. Friends, as Christians we should never reverse that order. Our love and commitment to our work should never equal our love for God, nor should it equal our love for our family. If we are working for Jesus, He is the boss. He commands us to keep our priorities straight, God first, then family, and then job.

Paul's focus, however, is that if you work for Jesus, it will improve your attitude toward your employer and your job. You won't treat your boss as God, but you will probably treat him/her better than you do now. You will not see your job as the most important thing in your life, but you will often view it as more important than you do now.

As Christians, we are to be concerned about our employers' interests. Listen again to **Ephesians**

6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ. Again, employees are not slaves, but much of what Paul says applies. Christian employees do not just look out for themselves, they think about what is good for their employer. They seek to develop a balance that labor and management often find illusive. Christian employees strive to treat their boss as they want to be treated. For example, they will be honest. One morning Joe's boss asked, "Say Joe, do you believe in life after death?" Joe responded, "Well, yes I do." "Good," the boss said, "because after you took the day off yesterday for your grandfather's funeral, he came to see you." Okay, maybe Joe had two grandfathers, but more likely he had lied to the boss.

A Christian employee should not be stretching a 15-minute coffee break into 30-minute break. A Christian employee should not be complaining about the boss to other employees. In other words, a Christian worker should love his/her boss. If you do that, our boss may be shocked. He may think you are trying to get a raise or promotion. Fellow employees may not be thrilled by your attitude, but it is the attitude the Lord expects from us.

Christians should also have a new attitude toward work itself. **Ephesians 6:6b, 7 As bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.** A Christian must realize that no job is unimportant, if it is the work God has called you to do. As Martin Luther said, "The work of housewives and shopkeepers is just as holy as that of a clergyman. To wash dishes or mend shoes for the glory of God is not less a sacred task than preaching the gospel."

Now we may not think our job is very exciting, but it probably beats being a 1st century slave. If they were to do their work with enthusiasm, we probably should do so as well. Now, many folks view work as a necessary evil. They think the only reason to work is for a paycheck. That is not the Bible's perspective. Work is not a result of the fall. The book of Genesis tells us Adam and Eve were put in the garden not just to relax, but to work. **Genesis 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.** And Eve was to share in that assignment. The curse, found in Genesis 3, is that work will

now be difficult. The Lord says it will now require "painful toil" for human being to get enough food on which to live. As Christians we have an opportunity to go back, at least partly, toward Eden where work can be meaningful and enjoyable. This new perspective can eliminate much of the dissatisfaction people feel with their jobs, and it will also go a long way toward getting rid of conflict at work.

Now, let's consider some implications of what Paul says for those who do not have a job. This includes many of you in this room. First, students. Some of you are too young to be employed. Yet, if you are in school, public, private, or home school, you need to have a Christian attitude toward your education. You should be diligent doing your schoolwork. The goal is not always to get A's, but to learn. You should study for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and you should treat your teacher, who is kind of like a boss, with respect.

Students, if you do those things, you are letting your light shine for others. A public-school teacher who doesn't attend Chisholm Baptist Church, told me she appreciates what we are doing, because of the positive attitude students from this church have toward both teachers and other students. If you are in school, you can honor the Lord the same way a worker can.

Some of you are stay at home moms or homemakers and thus are not employed. Maybe you feel like you can relate to slaves, not because your husband is a master, but because you don't get paid for your work. Yet, the Lord brings great dignity to taking care of children and doing housework. You might often feel bored and that you are stuck at home, but you are doing very important work. The motivation for a woman, or man doing housework should be this: Love for family and devotion to the Lord Jesus.

In his community John Stott says, "The goal for a housewife can be to cook a meal as if Jesus were going to eat it or to clean the bathroom as if Jesus were going to be a guest." Now, those doing housework need to avoid the "Martha Syndrome." She was the sister of Mary and Lazarus. Martha was so busy working, so busy with household chores, she didn't have time for people of the Lord. Perfect housework and perfect meals are probably not what the Lord asks from you, but He does want that work to be done in Jesus' name.

Okay, self-employed folks maybe thinking, “Boy, am I glad I am my own boss. I am not accountable to anyone. I don’t have to worry about my attitude.” Wrong! If you are a Christian, you are working for Jesus and you are accountable to Him. You need to work diligently; you need to treat customers and others with whom you deal fairly and with respect. And this can be hard for many self-employed folks, remember your work is not the most important thing in this world. You are to serve the Lord, not whatever your self-employed job is.

And then there are many of you who are retired. You likely worked for many years, but now you don’t have any boss to deal with. Wrong again! Jesus is still your boss. He tells retired people, including you, “Do not be idle. Don’t just sit in front of the TV or computer screen.” If you are physically able, volunteer work is a great idea. And there is no better place to volunteer than at church. Teaching Sunday School, serving on a committee, helping with various projects, are all great opportunities to work.

If those things don’t seem exciting, remember they are important jobs because they can be done for the Lord, and can be done with enthusiasm. No, you won’t get paid. But that is okay. You don’t have to worry about getting too much money and increasing your taxes or impacting your social security benefits. And far more important, **Ephesians 6:8 that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.**

Friends, whether you are young or old, a retired nuclear physicist or a retired janitor, no matter who you are, if you serve in the name of Jesus, the Lord promises you a rich reward. Someone said, the church is always full of willing people. There are those willing to work and those willing to let them. Friends, if you are retired, make sure you are one of those willing to work.

Now, there is one more group of people to address. The Lord also has instructions for employers or the boss. A few of you here are in that category. **Ephesians 6:8 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 not partiality with him.**

Again, a modern boss is different from a master with slaves, but what Paul says has implications for today. A Christian boss needs to recognize that a Christian employee is a brother or sister in Christ. A Christian boss is to treat all workers fairly, justly and with kindness. A Christian employer should pay fair wages to his/her employees and should be known for being generous. A Christian foreman should not berate someone in front of other workers. A Christian teacher should treat students with love and respect. That is what the Lord expects. Almost all of us act as employers in some situations. For example, if we hire someone to mow the lawn or build a garage, we need to treat them fairly and not take advantage of them. Many Christians are “frugal.” We like to find a good deal. Maybe you like to buy everything at cost. One study found that people who attend church regularly are some of the least generous tippers in restaurants. We need to remember that those whom we employ to serve us, the grocer, the car dealer, the waitress, all need to make a fair wage, so they have adequate money on which to live.

Years ago, a trade official from the Soviet Union was visiting an American factory. At noon the lunch whistle blew, and 500 men and women immediately stopped working and left the building. “Your workers, they are escaping!” cried the communist. “Aren’t you going to stop them?” The factory manager replied, “I’m not worried. They’ll be back.” At exactly 1:00 p.m. the whistle blew again, and all the workers returned from their lunch hour.

After the tour, the American asked, “Well, do you think you might be interested in buying any of the products we manufacture here?” “Forget the products,” said the communist, “How much do you want for that whistle?” Friends, as Christians, we should be motivated to work well, not by fear of the boss, not for a desire for money, not even by a magic whistle. It is a relationship with Jesus Christ that enables us to have a new attitude toward our work and toward the people with whom we work. May the Lord help us to honor Him when we are on the job this week.