



Ephesians 6:5-9
The Christian At Work

We have been working our way through the book of Ephesians, seeing how God wants to order and structure our most personal relationships. It's been a little uncomfortable at times because God is getting into our business, telling us how we should live as wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. We've been seeing that God wants more than just our Sundays and our bedtime prayers, He wants to step in and re-order every part of our lives. And now this morning, we deal with another uncomfortable area: the workplace.

You see, whether we realize it or not, Jesus is there at our jobsite. And He wants that truth to affect what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. The things we're going to see in Scripture today can have an immediate impact on the work you do tomorrow: how you see it, how you approach it. So read with me:

Eph 6:5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free.
9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Now, obviously, we can't make direct application of what is being said here because none of us are actually servants or the masters who own them. (If you want to know more about servants, and what the Bible has to say about them, I'll point you to our website where you can find four sermons I did on the book of Philemon which was written to a master about his servant.) But this morning, we're going to skip over all of that and see that what we can do is translate the principle that's being taught to our modern identity as workers and employers or supervisors.

What's happening here in Ephesians is that both servants and masters are encouraged to respond in a certain way *because of their identity in Christ*. Bondservants should serve as though Jesus was their master, and masters should remember that they have a master too. The point is: both the superior and the subordinate have another identity at play. They are more than just a position on the org chart or a name on the schedule, they have an eternal identity and that should be driving what they do and say when they show up for work.

Now, if you've been with us lately as we study Ephesians, that's nothing new to you. It's the same idea behind the instruction we read for Christian wives and Christian husbands. They were each told to treat their spouse a certain way because of the reality of Christ above and

in them. And last week we saw the same thing with Christian children and Christian parents, we were told to do and not do certain things in our relationships with our family, *because* God is there and He is real, and our truest, deepest, most long-lasting identity is our identity in Him, which then compels us to act a certain way here on earth.

Last week we made much about the fact that children were addressed directly. They were seen as part of the church, they were included. Men and women, boys and girls, were all expected to be part of the church. But now we see the same things applies to servants and masters.

The expectation was that both would be saved, that both belong in the church. And there was an equality in the church that would eventually leak out into the culture as a force of change. It was absolutely revolutionary. It was counter-cultural. And it must have been tremendously difficult for some people to accept initially.

Think about it: everything else about the culture said who you are is who you are in society, what family you were born into, what position you hold, where you live, how you dress, where you went to school. That is your identity.

And then the gospel comes along and says, no. All of that stuff is just a bunch of sprinkles on the top. Who you really are is an eternal soul that will either live forever in the presence of God or suffer eternally for sin. Don't worry about your promotions, assignments, or projects here on earth, worry about your eternal retirement plan. Worry about your soul. As Jesus once asked, "[What does it profit a man to gain the whole earth and lose his soul?](#)" ([Matt 16:26](#))

Who you are in the eyes of God is who you really are. That's what really matters, and that is who and what you will be forever. Regardless of whether you make the team, or get the degree, or work the project. It doesn't matter what you retire as or where you retire from or whether you even have the option to retire. Your true identity is the identity you have in or apart from Christ, and that is what everything else should be built on. Including your role at work.

But what we tend to do is divide life into categories we call secular and sacred. Sacred things are God-things, God-places, and everything else is secular. We have this relationship with God, but it's kind of limited to the time we spend at church, the time we pray; everything else is 'real world.'

Pastor Matt shared a great analogy last week. He said some people, even in the church, look at their life like it's a pie chart, and they say, this is how much of my time and attention and effort is given to God and the church, it's the Jesus piece of my life. And we think about how big or how small that slice is based on our church attendance and involvement, our devotional and prayer life, what radio station we're listening to. And you think, well, the pastors have a really big slice, but I've got a lot going on and my slice is kind of small, maybe I can make it bigger in a few months.

But in reality, Jesus isn't supposed to be a slice of our life, just a percentage or a portion, He's supposed to be the pie plate that everything else is resting on.

Is that how you see your life? Is Jesus a slice of pie, or is He your pie plate? Does Christ provide the basis for everything else you do? Is He your foundation?

I know this is a very foreign way of looking at things for some people, but it's very Biblical. And it can free us from the two big mistakes we often make when it comes to work. We lean toward idleness or idolatry.

The first is idleness, sitting idle, doing nothing, or skating by. That could be because you don't see a need to do anything, you don't want to do anything, or you feel like what's the point? You can feel this as a teenager, as a stay at home mom, or as worker on the jobsite. No one is immune from the pull of inertia or the frustration that comes from having to do the same thing for the umpteenth million time with no appreciation from anyone.

But don't think this doesn't apply to you fast movers and type-A's. Even if you're moving like a rocket ship in some areas of life you could be completely idle in others because you just don't feel like dealing with it. And what's a better excuse for inaction than being so busy?

In order to fight all of this, Christians need to remember: God gave us work to do before the Fall of Adam and Eve. God made the world and everything in it, and it was good, very good. He said so. And then He put Adam and Eve in the world and told them to work in it. To study it, learn about it, see the animals and name them. Tend to the planet. The point is: we were created to participate in work, even in paradise.

Now, work was corrupted by the Fall. When sin came into the world, work suddenly became harder. Adam was told thorns and thistles would inherit the earth, and that we would earn our keep by the sweat of our brow. There would be frustration and difficulty in our work. But that doesn't make work wrong.

God has set up the rules of the world in such a way as to reward diligence and labor when done right. Proverbs is full of exhortations to work hard and warnings of the calamity brought about by laziness and idleness.

Proverbs 6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be wise,
7 Which, having no captain,
Overseer or ruler,
8 Provides her supplies in the summer,
And gathers her food in the harvest.
9 How long will you slumber, O sluggard?
When will you rise from your sleep?
10 A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep—

11 So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.

Pr 13:4 The soul of a lazy *man* desires, and *has* nothing;
But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.

It's a theme that continues on into the New Testament as well. Paul told the churches that if someone would not work, neither shall he eat.

And he told a young pastor:

1 Tim 5:8 if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Here's the point: idleness is simply not an option for Christians. Work has a profoundly religious nature for the Christian because all of our work is done in the sight of God as an act of devotion to Him and an act of service toward others. I'll say that again: Christians work as an act of devotion to God and service to others.

Work, wherever I do it, provides me an opportunity to fulfill the Great Commandment – to love the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love my neighbor, or my co-worker as myself. Whether it's chores, or daily duties around the house, or showing up for your duties in the House of Representatives or the White House, work is a place for me to worship. But, Christian, do you realize that? Do you ever think in these terms? Do you ever pull into your parking place, or pull out the lawnmower or ironing board, and think: this is about to be an act of worship?

Don't fall into that trap of thinking worship is just something you sing or something you do around a campfire or at church. Giving a lecture can be worship. Cleaning a floor can be worship. Changing an engine can be worship. Attending a meeting can be worship. If you see yourself there in the sight of God. If you dedicate your action and effort to God and ask Him for guidance and strength, wisdom and insight, courage and concern so that you can please Him in the place He has positioned you today.

Your work can resist the flow of corruption that is part of the Fall, it can pull beauty and order and benefit out of the world, and it can provide for you, your family, and others.

Our world is falling apart. Metal rusts. Wood rots. Carpets stain. Wars erupt. Organs fail. Nations collapse. Your work might be to resist the creep of corruption and decay. I don't know, maybe there won't be dust in Heaven, but there is dust on earth and it needs to be resisted, it needs to be pushed back and cleaned up. Things need to be rebuilt. People need to be healed. Can you find some aspect of that in your work? Are you resisting the disintegrating effects of the Fall in people, groups, things, or nations?

Or does your work involve making things better in new and novel ways? Are you a creator? A designer, inventor, entrepreneur? You can do this with something as simple as the

evening meal or packing the kids lunch. Make a sandwich, but make it special. Improve it. Or you can do it in hi-tech ways: write code, but write it in a way that works, go the extra mile to test it, consider how users will use it, and make it as good as you can for them instead of cranking it out as quickly as you can. Put an artist's stamp on the things you do.

Teachers, coaches, trainers - you're shaping human beings; pouring good things in and pulling bad things out. It may be in small ways. It may be in things that don't seem that important now, but take the big picture view. After you lay these simple things in place, what can be laid down next, and after that, and after that? You might not be the one putting the cherry on top, but that doesn't make your work pointless. Do it as unto the Lord. Be a blessing to those you serve.

And if you are a master, if you have people working for you, thank God for the privilege of being influential. Ask Him to use you to bring blessings to these people.

I think of two examples many of you are familiar with: Chick-Fil-A and In-N-Out. Both are fast-food restaurants that have a reputation for making great food, for satisfying their customers. Both also have a reputation as a great place to work. They take good care of their people and help them advance. Christians started both companies and both weave their love for God and people into the fabric of their business. And God has prospered them for blessing others.

Which brings us to another aspect of work: the money we make. Money that helps you provide for your own needs and the needs of others. Money is a liquid form of life. You give your life to your work and you get money in return. A little money, or a lot of money, but it's a condensed form of your life. So when you spend money, think of it that way - you're actually spending your life, or your parent's life as the case may be. You're giving a part of you to get something else. Is it worth it? Are you worshipping with how you earned it and how you spend it?

Some of you are blessed with well-paying jobs that give you more than you need to take care of yourself and your family, and God is giving you those extra funds so that you can make a huge difference for the kingdom. DL Moody used to go to businessmen in Chicago and tell them: God has allowed you to have a large sum of money in the bank. You have the ability to write a check and make this ministry, or this project, or this building, happen, to be the way God moves this ministry forward. Will you do it?

Now, that's not my style. But I get what he was saying. And he was right. And God used Moody and those Christian businessmen to do a tremendous work for the kingdom of God.

Today God is entrusting each of us with the resources to build His church, reach people, and advance the kingdom. And those resources come from our work. From the deals we make, the programs we develop, the business we create. Do you see it that way? Do you see your work as an act of worship that enables you to give, glorify God and reach others?

Some of us are called to give in extraordinary ways, but all of us are called to give in ordinary ways. Tithing is a way of recognizing that my money comes from God, my ability to produce and increase comes from Him.

Giving enables me to demonstrate, in a very practical way, to myself, my family, and to God, that I value the eternal over the immediate. I believe in investing in His kingdom instead of building my own. And I believe that the fruits of my labor are meant to be shared with the less fortunate through benevolence, charity, missions, etcetera.

So, here's the point again: God values work, not idleness. God called Noah to build an ark instead of just giving him one. God sent Joseph to work in the court of Pharaoh in Egypt to serve as an administrator in the government to save people during a coming famine. He sent Nehemiah to serve as an administrator in another government so he could eventually be sent out to run the program of rebuilding Jerusalem. He sent Daniel to be a counselor in yet another government. And each of those men: Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah were taken by force into the work they did, they were employed by foreign, pagan, governments but God used them, in those less-than-ideal settings to walk with integrity and benefit people. He blessed their work.

And then you have men like Bezalel and Oholiab, men used by God to do what we would call blue-collar work, skilled labor, building the tabernacle where God would be worshipped.

Ex 31:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "... I have called by name Bezalel ... 3 And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of workmanship*, 4 to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, 5 in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of workmanship*.

In the New Testament, we find John the Baptist calling people to repentance and we read about soldiers and tax collectors coming to Him and asking: what about us, what should we do? And instead of telling them to resign or re-train to look for new work, he tells them how to take on their work with a new ethic. The point he's making is that it's all about the heart, not the profession. You can do almost anything vocationally with an awareness of God.

In the book of Acts we find a church mourning the loss of a dearly beloved sister with a terrible name: Dorcas. She was good with sewing and weaving and when she died people came to Peter showing him all of the tunics and garments she had made for them.

The apostle Paul was a tent-maker. What kind of tents do you think he made? Do you think people in the church warned new people about buying one of Paul's tents? Or do you think he had a waiting list of people ready to buy the next one he finished? Do you think he did good work?

And why do you think he did good work? To glorify God. To serve God with his hands and the labors of his brow. Jesus told parables about a sower planting seeds, a merchant discovering a pearl, a woman mixing yeast, fishermen casting nets, and workers in a vineyard. All illustrations taken from the world of work.

God calls people to know Him and serve Him more while they are at work. David, Moses, and Amos were all shepherding in the fields when God called them to make history. Peter, James, and John were fishermen cleaning their nets when Jesus called them. Moving up in history, William Carey was a cobbler, a shoe-maker when God grabbed him and used him to launch the modern missions movement. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a medical doctor in London's most prestigious medical college when God called him to pastor a small church in blue-collar town in Wales. For these men and many, many, others, the call to ministry came while they were at work but they already viewed the work they were doing as something they did for God before the call came.

Isaiah and Micah both talk about a coming day when we will beat our swords into plows and our spears into pruning tools. Equipment for war becomes equipment for work – do you find that interesting? Work isn't going anywhere. God wants us to work, and work well.

But He also wants us to do it without falling into the error of making it an idol: asking work to give me the identity I want or the things I think I need.

Some people make an idol out of work by working too hard, pulling an extra shift to make some extra cash or working too hard to make another sale, there's a line that we can cross in the pursuit of cash. We begin to trust in our own ability to provide and forget to pray, Give us this day, our daily bread.

But God has ways of frustrating us in the process. There's this haunting line in Psalm 106 where the Israelites were whining about the things they missed back in Egypt, and God gave them what they wanted, but it had a cost:

Ps 106:15 And He gave them their request,
But sent leanness into their soul.

And later, when Israel was back in the land, after the captivity in Babylon, they got caught up in improving their own houses and didn't make a priority out of rebuilding the Temple, so God simply withheld success from them and sent the prophet Haggai to explain what was happening:

Haggai 1:6 "You have sown much, and bring in little;
You eat, but do not have enough;
You drink, but you are not filled with drink;
You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;
And he who earns wages,
Earns wages *to put* into a bag with holes."

Maybe some of you can identify with that today. You feel like you're working hard and getting nowhere. Could that be because you've lost sight of your true identity and purpose as a servant of God? Perhaps if you got things put into the right order again, you would see different results.

One last way we go wrong by making an idol out of our work. We expect it to give us our identity. We see ourselves primarily as what we do, instead of who we are a servant of God. So we tell people, I'm a _____. Or it can cut the other way and deflate and discourage us instead of puffing us up if we think, I'm just a_____.

Friend, God is FAR more concerned about who you are than He is about what you do. The day may come when you have step away from what you're doing. And that will often be difficult, but it will be downright painful if you have stitched your identity at work to the edges of your soul, if you're trying to gain your identity from where you get your paycheck.

That's the whole point of the passage in Ephesians, right? Servants, Masters, don't see yourself just as servants or masters, see yourself as servants or masters in the light of God. That's your true identity, that's who you really are.

A lot of stuff to think about today. I know God has speaking to some of you, helping you see direct application for these things. Don't walk away from that. Listen to Him, and let Him shape you. It will make a difference in what happens tomorrow or the next time you're at work.

Let's pray.