

**Living In Resurrection Power
(Week 12)
Ephesians 6:5-9
“Christians in the Workplace”**

Introduction

“...submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Ephesians 5:21

In Paul’s time, slavery was not only accepted as normal and necessary, it was also quite commonplace throughout the Roman Empire. It is estimated that almost half of the population of Rome at one time was made up of slaves. With this vast number of human beings being bought and sold as property much like we would purchase tools or furniture, it is little wonder that many of them had believed in the message of the gospel and surrendered themselves to Christ. The gospel’s message of the equality found in God’s amazing grace is one that always resonates with those who feel “less than” and unworthy.

There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28

Just imagine how refreshing it was for those who were considered the “personal property” of their task masters to hear that, in Christ, **all** men are truly equal. Isn’t it wonderful how God can take someone to whom others assign little or no value, and then raise them up for His glory? I am reminded here of King David. The greatest king in the history of Israel, and yet, when the time came for a new king to be anointed by the Prophet Samuel, his parents didn’t even bother to call him in from the fields! Always remember, when others see a mere shepherd boy, God just may see a king! This is what He does. He takes those who are humble and lifts them up, and conversely, He doesn’t raise those who are impressed with themselves.

“...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

James 4:6

Of course, when all these slaves in Rome begin to realize their position in Christ, no doubt there was much confusion as to why they were still in bondage on this earth. Paul needed to remind them that to follow Christ was to endure all suffering for His glory. After all, Jesus submitted Himself to great hardship in order to save us. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we are often asked to do the same. The Spirit-filled child of God is to submit himself to those in authority, whether they be “fair” in their dealings or not. Therefore, as Christians, slaves should continue to serve their masters out of love and devotion to Christ.

Thankfully, the institution of slavery is against the law in most of the world today. As for the people of God, it is impossible to love your neighbor as yourself (**Mark 12:30-31**), and then subsequently, place him in chains. Therefore, no child of God, who is following Christ, could ever make an argument for the enslavement of others. That being said, these scriptures are still relevant to us as modern day believers. Paul’s commands to slaves and slaveholders most definitely can be extended to the Christian’s conduct in today’s workplace. We, as believers, are to live our lives, every aspect of our lives, in such a way that brings glory to God. This means that we should be the best employees that any company could ever hope to have. And, we should work diligently at our jobs, respecting those who are our superiors and serving them with the utmost degree of faithfulness, whether they deserve it or not!

Both employers and employees, who are believers in Christ, have a shared responsibility to submit to one another, just as believing husband and wives, children and parents. For in all situations, we submit ourselves to one another in the reverence of Jesus Christ. Therefore, employees (slaves) are to submit to their employers (masters), and employers are to submit themselves to care for the needs of their employees. If this world would truly adopt this Biblical approach to the workplace, then there would be no need for labor disputes, workers unions, strikes, or labor negotiators. Workers would do their absolute best to serve their bosses, and bosses would be eager to serve by looking out for the welfare of their employees. What a wonderful environment for the workplace! Wouldn’t you agree? The questions then, that we must ask ourselves are simple: Workers... are you living like a true believer on your job,

doing your very best while submitting to your superiors in reverence to Christ? And, Employers... are you treating your employees with the love of Christ, submitting yourselves to provide for their needs? Each of us, no matter our position, has been commanded to be submissive in the workplace, in order to bring glory to our Savior.

Servants and Masters

Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as you would Christ. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, do God's will from your heart. Serve with a good attitude, as to The LORD and not to people, knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from The LORD. **Ephesians 6:5-8**

Paul commands that slaves (*doulos* in the Greek) submit to their human masters with fear and trembling. The original text actually says "masters in the flesh", which is a way of expressing that while the master/slave relationship may very well be a condition of this world, there exists no such relationship in the kingdom of heaven. In Christ, we are all made one, as well as, equal (**Galatians 3:28**). However, as long as we remain in this cursed world, there are things that we must endure, and one of those things is inequality. It is part of the human condition, and all of us are subject to having others in authority over us. Often times, that authority is harsh and unkind, but we submit to it out of reverence to God.

Paul sometimes uses the phrase "fear and trembling" to convey a sense of humility and awe for our heavenly Master. For example, in **Philippians 2:12-13** he writes:

"Therefore my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God Who is working in you both to will and to work according to His good purpose."

The thought conveyed in each of these verses is the same, obey because you have a humble reverence for God. Just as a believer must "work out his own salvation", which simply means to act accordingly to his new nature, the servant is commanded to serve his master, for by doing so, he is simply obeying the will of God with the same reverence and awe. We submit to authority, not for fear of those who have authority over us, but rather, because we fear the One Who has the ultimate authority. The very heart of the true believer longs to please God.

"Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

2 Corinthians 5:9-10

So you see, we are commanded to serve others, because we will stand before Christ and give and account of just how we served. We are to respond even to the most harsh taskmasters, by doing even more than they ask of us. In Roman times, a soldier could compel a civilian to carry his heavy pack for up to one mile according to the Roman law. The people hated this law, and understandably so, for at any moment they could be forced to drop whatever that they were doing just to carry some cruel soldiers pack. And, don't think for a moment that there weren't plenty of soldiers who loved to do this just for the sickening air of superiority it gave them. But, just listen what Christ commanded of His followers in regard to this unfair practice:

"You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, give up your coat as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two." **Matthew 5:38-41**

When we read those words, they sound to us as indescribably “un-American”. In this country, we think we have the God-given right to fight for everything we believe that we deserve. But, we would do well to remember, that we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and as such, the “rules” are totally different! Your boss may be a real jerk. He may even be in all respects a “slave driver”, but Christ commands that you respond to his cruelty with love, kindness, and respect. We could probably give the invitation right now, and many of us would have some sins to confess. Can I get a witness?

Paul goes on to describe that if our heart motive is pure, then our service will be consistent. We won't just work hard when others are watching. But instead, we will work just as hard when no one is. Why? Because we know that the One that we are working for, truly sees it all. The best description that I have ever heard of integrity is; “Doing the right thing when no one is watching.” This is absolutely true, but the Christian also knows that His Master is ever watchful. Therefore, if we have integrity (a pure heart before God), then we will ever be serving with a good attitude. Which simply means that the child of God ought to always give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. We don't have to be watched in order to perform. We perform, because everything that we do is done for the glory of God.

Have you ever thought about the fact that when you go to clock in on your job that you are actually clocking in to serve Almighty God. He is your ultimate employer! He is the one that you are truly serving when you go to your job. You see, many Christians try and separate the spiritual from the secular. “Church is church, and work is work.”, they might say. But the fact remains that if you have been born again, God makes no such distinctions. You are part of a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, and **everything** that you do is a part of serving as a priest of God! This is why Paul reminds the Christian slaves of his day;

“Serve with a good attitude, as to The LORD and not to people, knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from The LORD.” **Ephesians 6:7-8**

This world is not the final stop for those who belong to Christ! You may, or may not, receive a reward for what you do here, but rest assured, God will reward you for being faithful. I once read a story of two missionaries, who had spent most of their lives serving Christ in Africa. When it came time for the elderly couple to retire and return to the U.S., by some coincidence, they found themselves on the same ship with President Theodore Roosevelt, who was returning home from a hunting safari.

When the ship arrived home in the states, a huge crowd had gathered at the docks to welcome the president and inquire about his successful hunt. Conversely, no one was at the dock that day to meet the old missionary couple. They were, to say the least, discouraged, and the man said to his wife, “We have served Christ for over forty years, and no one is here to welcome us home, and Mr. Roosevelt returns from a hunting trip, and everyone comes to see him.” The couple wondered why their sacrifice and devotion had seemingly gone unnoticed and prayed about the matter for several days. At the end of that time of prayer and seeking God, His Spirit impressed upon their hearts these words: **“But you are not home yet.”**

As followers of Christ, we must ever be mindful of the fact that God will welcome us home, when the time comes. So... we keep serving. Everything that we say and do, how we live our lives, at church, on the job, or in our homes, should ever be bringing glory to Him.

“Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.” **Galatians 6:9**

So employees, submit yourselves to your employers and always do your best to give a full day's work for a full day's pay. God sees it, even when no one else does. Do your job.....for Him!

Masters and Servants

“And masters, treat your slaves the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him.” **Ephesians 6:9**

The Most telling phrase in this verse is “*the same way*”. You see, all Christians are to submit to one another in reverence to Christ (**Ephesians 5:21**). Paul is quick to remind slave owners that they too, have a duty of submission. Just because a thing is legal, doesn’t necessarily make it moral. In *The Old Testament*, the children of Israel were allowed to purchase slaves from the “foreign lands around them” (**Leviticus 25:44**), but it should be duly noted that, in this case, these people were already enslaved by others, and they, in coming to Israel, would learn first hand of The One True God. To be in bondage among God’s people would be the only way that they could ever learn of God. So, in this regard, those slaves being sold to Israel was actually an act of grace. Remember that most of these nations ended up being subsequently destroyed for their wickedness.

But a slave owner in Paul’s time, who had surrendered his life to Christ, should have had a real dilemma on his hands when claiming to love his fellow believers, all the while keeping them in bondage. Paul commands these slave owners to treat their slaves as they would any other believer, with love and respect, as equals, and not as property. I suspect that many slaves were set free by their believing masters, but probably found themselves in a position of remaining in their employ for lack of any other place to go. Paul reminded these men that in God’s eyes, there is no such thing as slave and master. In God’s eyes, they were equals and brethren.

In much the same way, the Christian employer is to be ever mindful of the fact that just because he is “the boss” at work, he has no such rank in the kingdom. He too will stand before the judgement seat of Christ and give an account of just how he treated his employees. He has every right to demand a fair day’s work, but he also has every obligation to pay a fair day’s wage for it. Those who are in authority will also have much to answer for.

“But the one who did not know and did what deserved punishment will receive a light beating. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be expected.”

Luke 12:48

Just the same as a person who knows to do what is right, but doesn’t do it, will be treated more harshly than one who commits a sin in ignorance, the Christian taskmaster will have no excuses, when it comes to the fair treatment of those he oversees. For the Child of God should know better. We know that we are to love and submit to one another in the reverence of Christ. Being the boss doesn’t impress God. In fact, being the boss makes you more accountable for how you treat others. You see, the employer is in a much better position to see to it that the workers are treated with fairness and respect. A disgruntled worker can only make complaints, while an overseer can make real changes. Always remember, God is watching, and he sees you as no better than those over whom you have authority.

So these questions remain: Workers... are you giving your best on the job? Do you submit to the authority of your superiors in reverence to Christ? Can you be counted on to do your very best, even when no-one is looking? And bosses... Are you managing the workplace in a way that brings honor to God? Are you treating those in your employ as equals, with the desire to submit yourself to meeting their needs with the same zeal that you desire for them to serve? Do they matter to you, or are they just tools to be used until they are worn out and replaced? God is watching, and He expects His followers to submit one to another in the fear and reverence of Christ. Remember, the question is not “What does the Law require?” But rather, the question is, “What does LOVE require?” To be filled with The Spirit is to be filled in every aspect of our lives. This includes in our places of business.

And let ALL of God's servants and masters say... TRUTH!!!