

Series: Ephesians: *The Christian Mystery and Mission*

Week 26

CDOBC – beginning on 2/6/11

Title: “**The Christian at Work**”

Ephesians 6:5-9 ~ September 25, 2011

OBJECTIVE: To help believer’s excel and reveal Christ at their workplace.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- “Courageous” movie – sign-ups
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The workplace occupies more of the Christian’s time than any other activity in their week – other than sleep. Between forty and fifty hours every week are spent on the job, and so it’s crucial for you to understand the will of God for this area of your life.

Turn to Ephesians 6:5-9 – *Read passage*

The Bible – especially the Apostle Paul – has many critics. This is one of the passages many point to in an effort to justify their claims that Paul was writing from his own perspective and that he was lead not by the Spirit of God, but by his own beliefs and cultural ideas when he wrote this section. What they point to is that Paul addresses slaves and masters, but doesn’t condemn the institution and practice of slavery.

At the time of Paul’s writing, the Roman Empire had about 60 million slaves...about half of the Empire was free, served by the other half who were slaves. The cruel and evil treatment of slaves was commonplace – and slaves suffered greatly at this time in history.

Let me give you two thoughts in defense of the Bible – in defense of the Apostle Paul, which I believe counters the critic’s allegation.

First, Paul’s main purpose was not to deal with the issue of slavery, but to deal with the heart of those involved. Allow me to read a quote from John MacArthur on this point.

“New Testament teaching does not focus on reforming the restructuring human systems, which are never the root cause of human problems. The issue is always the heart of man – which when wicked will corrupt the best of systems and when righteous will improve the worst. If men’s sinful hearts are not changed, they will find ways to oppress others regardless of whether or not there is actual slavery. On the other hand, Spirit-filled believers will have just and harmonious relationships with each other, no matter what system they live under. Man’s basic problems and needs are not political, social, or economic but spiritual, and that is the area on which Paul here concentrates.” (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Ephesians, by John

MacArthur, p. 324)

Second, I do think that Paul attacks slavery in this passage, but he does so not by attacking the institution, but by resetting the relationships between the people involved – which would change the practices and get rid of the abuses that were so commonplace. What he says in this passage (vs. 9) was the initial light of God’s truth which eventually, centuries later, as it shone more brightly, led to slavery being abolished in Europe and America.

Once again, remember that God has commanded that we are “filled with the Spirit” 5:18, and that we should “submit to one another out of reference (fear) for Christ.” 5:21

Under the umbrella of those two commands, the Apostle has instructed us on the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship, and now he addresses the other dominant relationship in life, the boss-worker relationship. I say ‘boss-worker’ because it’s the same context and application as ‘master-slave’ was in the first century.

Worker, obey the boss. vs. 5

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

The word “obey” is the same Greek word translated “obey” in vs. 1. Just as vs. 1 is simple and direct regarding children obeying their parents, this is also a simple and direct command to workers to obey their boss.

“respect and fear” is not to be understood as cowering in the corner awaiting some punishment from your boss, but the idea is reverence and humility...to have a servant’s heart and attitude.

Phil. 2:12 “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...”

For the worker to have this attitude is necessary because the reality is that some bosses are not very good bosses! Some are inept and lack wisdom. How they ascended to their position of authority is the fodder for much office gossip, but the boss may not instill much confidence in their decision making, or in their

person. However, they are the boss. Therefore, the Christian worker must acknowledge their authority, and not only obey them, but obey them with respect and ‘fear’ because God has not only put you under their authority for the duration of your employment, but they have the power to relieve you from your employment!

In addition, you are to obey your boss with a sincere obedience. This is an interesting word in the Greek. It can be defined as “simple, pure, gracious, sincere” and it carries the idea of ‘without folds, like a piece of cloth that is unfolded’, meaning uncomplicated, nothing hidden. (<http://concordances.org/greek/572.htm>)

So Paul is telling us that we must obey our boss, without ulterior or hidden motives, we need to be open and transparent in our work, and we should be singly-focused on doing our work as our boss has directed us.

Treating him/her with respect to their face, and mocking or ridiculing them with the others in the office is unacceptable for the believer. Worker...obey the boss!

At work, please God, not just people. vs. 6-7

6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. **7** Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,

Being an industrious worker while your boss is in the room, only to start playing computer games or surfing the web when they leave, is not the work ethic God commands you to have. Once again, Paul tells you to work for your boss as if you were

working for Christ...because in a sense you are working for Christ!

Be a trustworthy worker

“...not only...when their eye is on you...”

Titus 2:9-10 “Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

This is so much bigger than your work! Since you spend so many hours each week at your job, you probably have more opportunities to share Christ at your job than any other place / activity. Most of you probably work in a place that frowns on you openly talking about Christ while you're working. If this is the case, don't be discouraged by this, but take advantage of the great opportunity this gives you! One of the greatest complaints that non-believers have against believers is that they are hypocrites. What a great opportunity you have in your work arena, to demonstrate the impact your faith has in your life! As a Christian, you should have the best work ethic and the best attitude of anyone at your job! You may not have the most talent, or the best numbers, but you should have the best attitude and you should clearly be one of the hardest workers – because of your faith in Christ! On breaks, or at lunch, if you have a receptive audience, you can share Christ and talk

specifically about the grace and truth of Christ, but while you are working, let your actions and your attitude speak volumes about your faith!

Be a committed worker

“...from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly...”

I see here that we should give our best effort at our job. The Lord deserves nothing less than our best – and we are told here to work at our job “...as if you were serving the Lord...”

Col. 3:23 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men...”

1 Corinthians 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Our motivation is eternal, not temporal reward. vs. 8

8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

Sometimes, you can do all the right things...you can obey the boss, you can serve the Lord and be a trusted and committed worker, and someone in the office takes the credit for something you were instrumental in doing. Sometimes you can set things straight, but there are times when you can't – whether it's office politics, or maybe they resent you for your dedication on the job (Remember, when you excel in these areas, their lack of obedience, trustworthiness and commitment is more obvious!)

Of course, when we work, we get paid for our work. But there may be times that you get passed over for the promotion, or your work goes unnoticed and you don't receive a bonus. Like I said a few minutes ago – sometimes you can rectify this when it happens, but when you can't, you need to take refuge in the fact that God will reward you for not only what you do, but especially for the attitude and character you exemplify each day – and it goes unnoticed and uncompensated. But God notices...and He will compensate you not on pay-day, but for eternity!

Commands for the boss vs. 9

9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Verse 9 gives us some timeless principles for bosses – and I believe this is the verse that attacks the institution of slavery, and the abusive practices that were commonplace.

Serve your workers like you serve the Lord. vs. 6b-7

This doesn't mean you relegate your position of authority and leadership, but you serve them, as Christ serves the Church. Christ is the Church's authority – it's Head – yet He serves the Church. You are the boss, the owner, the manager, you have authority over the workers, you are the company 'head' over them – yet you are called to serve them as you lead them.

“submit to one another out of reverence (*fear*) for Christ.” 5:21

Treat your workers with dignity and respect. vs. 9

Threatening them in an unjust way is abusing your authority and position. Jesus told us that we were to be different than those who '*lord over others by being heavy-handed toward those under their care*' (Matt. 20:25).

Instead, you need to realize that even your lowest ranking worker is made in the image of God – and Jesus loves them and died for them with the same measure of devotion and love as He did for you!

It is in this manner, that I believe the Apostle destroys the underlying foundation of slavery, and puts the slave and the master on the same level. They both have equal value in the eyes of God – in every way – and in the end, it is only God's view of persons that holds any merit!

Treat your workers equally. vs. 9

This doesn't mean every worker should be paid equally, or that you don't give some workers more responsibility than others, but the Christian boss makes these distinctions with proper motives and based on wisdom and truth – not on favoritism or for their own personal gain.

Application

Be a 6:1-3 worker...

If you follow a boss' directions, and you're a trustworthy and committed worker, you will always be in demand. Even in dire economic times, employers will hire you because they need people who do what they're told, and who can be trusted to work hard at their job. It seems that these traits are getting more and more scarce in our society, and you will be blessed if you obey what God tells you to do in the workplace.

Be a 6:4 boss...

Good pay is not enough to retain good, quality workers. As a business owner, or someone in a leadership position in business, you need to be a 6:4 boss! Serving your employees and treating them with respect, dignity, and fairness will create a workplace that will draw good people

This is nothing new...the search for good, reliable, and capable employees has been with us since Adam had to start weeding the garden, since Noah was building the ark! The search by good workers, trying to find a good place to work has gone on for just as long!

In 1898, the Spanish American War broke out, and it lasted about ten weeks, resulting in the defeat of Spain. At that time, Cuba was under the rule of Spain, and the Cuban people had been revolting against Spain's rule for decades. After certain events and atrocities, America decided to support the efforts of

the Cuban revolutionaries, and eventually President McKinley was pressured to declare war against Spain.

General Garcia was one of the leading commanders of the Cuban soldiers, and you can imagine that communication with him was difficult – seemingly impossible given the technology available and the rugged terrain of Cuba.

President McKinley desperately needed to communicate with Garcia, so a soldier by the name of Rowan was recommended to McKinley for the job. The President gave Rowan a letter for him to deliver to Garcia. Nobody knew where Garcia was, but four days later Rowan landed by night onto the coast of Cuba, and on foot, traversed the country on foot, and delivered the message to Garcia. Three weeks after he landed on Cuban soil, Rowan came out on the other side of the island, mission accomplished.

In the following year, 1899, a small magazine editor by the name of Elbert Hubbard needed a filler article for his next issue. So, after dinner one night, he sat down in his study, and wrote an article about this soldier – Rowan – and what a great job he did in delivering a message to Garcia. The article's contents spoke to the great need for workers to be as obedient, trustworthy, and capable as Rowan. It was published without a title.

It wasn't long before the little magazine started receiving requests for copies that contained the untitled article. A request for 10 copies, 50 copies, then one day, the President of a large railroad company requested 100,000 copies! He wanted to give a copy to each of his employees. After that, a

president of a Russian railroad company read the article while visiting the U.S., and when he got home he had the article translated into Russian and distributed copies to all of his employees.

After this, the author, Elbert Hubbard decided to name the article, so he named it “*A Message to Garcia*”. It spread into Germany, France, Spain, Turkey, India, and China. During the war between Russia and Japan, every Russian soldier was given a copy of this article. The Japanese, finding the booklets in possession of the Russian prisoners, concluded it must be a good thing, and translated it into Japanese. A copy was given to every man working for the Japanese Government. In all, it was translated into 37 languages and sold over 40 million copies, becoming one of the best-selling items ever printed. Why? Because finding good, capable, obedient, hard-working, trustworthy workers has always been a great challenge for business owners, and because workers have always struggled finding a job that not only pays well, but more importantly where the boss / owner treats them with respect and dignity.

God’s way works! Ephesians 6:1-4 – when you obey it – will result in blessings both in this world and the next!

May you honor God at your work – so that Christ will be seen!

1899

A Message to Garcia

By Elbert Hubbard

In all this Cuban business there is one man stands out on the horizon of my memory like Mars at perihelion. When war broke out between Spain & the United States, it was very necessary to communicate quickly with the leader of the Insurgents. Garcia was somewhere in the mountain vastness of Cuba- no one knew where. No mail nor telegraph message could reach him. The President must secure his cooperation, and quickly.

What to do!

Someone said to the President, "There's a fellow by the name of Rowan will find Garcia for you, if anybody can."

Rowan was sent for and given a letter to be delivered to Garcia.

How "the fellow by the name of Rowan" took the letter, sealed it up in an oil-skin pouch, strapped it over his heart, in four days landed by night off the coast of Cuba from an open boat, disappeared into the jungle, & in three weeks came out on the other side of the Island, having traversed a hostile country on foot, and delivered his letter to Garcia, are things I have no special desire now to tell in detail.

The point I wish to make is this: McKinley gave Rowan a letter to be delivered to Garcia; Rowan took the letter and did not ask, "Where is he at?" By the Eternal! There is a man whose form should be cast in deathless bronze and the statue placed in every college of the land. It is not book-learning young men need, nor instruction about this and that, but a stiffening of the vertebrae which will cause them to be loyal to a trust, to act promptly, concentrate their energies: do the thing- "Carry a message to Garcia!"

General Garcia is dead now, but there are other Garcias.

No man, who has endeavored to carry out an enterprise where many hands were needed, but has been well nigh appalled at times by the imbecility of the average man- the inability or unwillingness to concentrate on a thing and do it. Slip-shod assistance, foolish inattention, dowdy indifference, & half-hearted work seem the rule; and no man succeeds, unless by hook or crook, or threat, he forces or bribes other men to assist him; or mayhap, God in His goodness performs a miracle, & sends him an Angel of Light for an assistant. You, reader, put this matter to a test: You are sitting now in your office- six clerks are within call.

Summon any one and make this request: "Please look in the encyclopedia and make a brief memorandum for me concerning the life of Correggio".

Will the clerk quietly say, "Yes, sir," and go do the task?

On your life, he will not. He will look at you out of a fishy eye and ask one or more of the following questions:

Who was he?

Which encyclopedia?

Where is the encyclopedia?

Was I hired for that?

Don't you mean Bismarck?

What's the matter with Charlie doing it?

Is he dead?

Is there any hurry?

Shan't I bring you the book and let you look it up yourself?

What do you want to know for?

And I will lay you ten to one that after you have answered the questions, and explained how to find the information, and why you

want it, the clerk will go off and get one of the other clerks to help him try to find Garcia- and then come back and tell you there is no such man. Of course I may lose my bet, but according to the Law of Average, I will not.

Now if you are wise you will not bother to explain to your "assistant" that Correggio is indexed under the C's, not in the K's, but you will smile sweetly and say, "Never mind," and go look it up yourself.

And this incapacity for independent action, this moral stupidity, this infirmity of the will, this unwillingness to cheerfully catch hold and lift, are the things that put pure Socialism so far into the future. If men will not act for themselves, what will they do when the benefit of their effort is for all? A first-mate with knotted club seems necessary; and the dread of getting "the bounce" Saturday night, holds many a worker to his place.

Advertise for a stenographer, and nine out of ten who apply, can neither spell nor punctuate- and do not think it necessary to.

Can such a one write a letter to Garcia?

"You see that bookkeeper," said the foreman to me in a large factory.

"Yes, what about him?"

"Well he's a fine accountant, but if I'd send him up town on an errand, he might accomplish the errand all right, and on the other hand, might stop at four saloons on the way, and when he got to Main Street, would forget what he had been sent for."

Can such a man be entrusted to carry a message to Garcia?

We have recently been hearing much maudlin sympathy expressed for the "downtrodden denizen of the sweat-shop" and the "homeless

wanderer searching for honest employment," & with it all often go many hard words for the men in power.

Nothing is said about the employer who grows old before his time in a vain attempt to get frowsy ne'er-do-wells to do intelligent work; and his long patient striving with "help" that does nothing but loaf when his back is turned. In every store and factory there is a constant weeding-out process going on. The employer is constantly sending away "help" that have shown their incapacity to further the interests of the business, and others are being taken on. No matter how good times are, this sorting continues, only if times are hard and work is scarce, the sorting is done finer- but out and forever out, the incompetent and unworthy go.

It is the survival of the fittest. Self-interest prompts every employer to keep the best- those who can carry a message to Garcia.

I know one man of really brilliant parts who has not the ability to manage a business of his own, and yet who is absolutely worthless to anyone else, because he carries with him constantly the insane suspicion that his employer is oppressing, or intending to oppress him. He cannot give orders; and he will not receive them. Should a message be given him to take to Garcia, his answer would probably be, "Take it yourself."

Tonight this man walks the streets looking for work, the wind whistling through his threadbare coat. No one who knows him dare employ him, for he is a regular fire-brand of discontent. He is impervious to reason, and the only thing that can impress him is the toe of a thick-soled No. 9 boot.

Of course I know that one so morally deformed is no less to be pitied than a physical cripple; but in our pitying, let us drop a tear,

too, for the men who are striving to carry on a great enterprise, whose working hours are not limited by the whistle, and whose hair is fast turning white through the struggle to hold in line dowdy indifference, slip-shod imbecility, and the heartless ingratitude, which, but for their enterprise, would be both hungry & homeless. Have I put the matter too strongly? Possibly I have; but when all the world has gone a-slumming I wish to speak a word of sympathy for the man who succeeds- the man who, against great odds has directed the efforts of others, and having succeeded, finds there's nothing in it: nothing but bare board and clothes.

I have carried a dinner pail & worked for day's wages, and I have also been an employer of labor, and I know there is something to be said on both sides. There is no excellence, per se, in poverty; rags are no recommendation; & all employers are not rapacious and high-handed, any more than all poor men are virtuous.

My heart goes out to the man who does his work when the "boss" is away, as well as when he is at home. And the man who, when given a letter for Garcia, quietly take the missive, without asking any idiotic questions, and with no lurking intention of chucking it into the nearest sewer, or of doing aught else but deliver it, never gets "laid off," nor has to go on a strike for higher wages. Civilization is one long anxious search for just such individuals. Anything such a man asks shall be granted; his kind is so rare that no employer can afford to let him go. He is wanted in every city, town and village- in every office, shop, store and factory. The world cries out for such: he is needed, & needed badly- the man who can carry a message to Garcia.

THE END-