

## **Walking Wisely as We Work** Ephesians 6:5-9

Ephesians 6:5-9 (ESV) Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, [8] knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. [9] 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 no partiality with him.

### **Introduction**

- A. The title of this sermon is **Walking Wisely as We Work**. I hope to show you that this text speaks to each one of us about the way we perform our work as Christians.
  - 1. In New Testament times, commerce or business was home-based. Paul here is continuing on about life in the home (marriage, family and livelihood). Be filled, be submitting (Ephesians review).
  - 2. In New Testament times slavery was quite common. Slavery was so common that it would not make sense to speak about the slavery problem in that era. You were either slave or free.

Galatians 3:28 (ESV) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- 3. Even Jonathan Edwards owned several slaves and he has taken heat for that. The word is that Mrs. Edwards was grateful (friends of the family).
- B. In our day you are either employee or employer when it comes to livelihood. The Bible speaks to principles and these principles apply as we do our work.
  - 1. I will cover three sections. One, the issue of slavery. Two, the responsibility of Christian slaves (employees) and three, the responsibility of Christian masters (employers).

### **I. You notice the first word in the text is “slaves.”**

- A. That word slaves (accurate) probably evokes different reactions from us. Some options:
  - 1. This section of Ephesians is to slaves and masters and I’m neither so I’ll move on.
  - 2. Perhaps you respond by thinking how embarrassing this is. Critics of Christianity love to pick on the Bible regarding slavery (see recent atheists). Paul didn’t even protest.

Christian preachers of all kinds had justified slavery until the American Civil War and even afterwards, on the supposed biblical warrant that of the three sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth), Ham had been cursed and cast into servitude. Christopher Hitchens in *God is Not Great*, p 166-167

- 3. Maybe (probably a longshot) you think slavery should still be around. Every society must decide what to do with the poor in their midst (better than welfare?).
  - 4. Possibly you've given the issue no thought at all.
- B. Slavery is not an easy topic because the Bible does not call slavery sin. Let it be understood that neither is slavery commanded.

1. It is also a difficult subject because here we meet church and state, economics, cultures and issues like rebellion and revolution.

C. Why are the Scriptures not more concerned?

1. If God was just and righteous, wouldn't He outlaw slavery? Instead, the Bible seems to go right along with it (sticking to the NT).

Colossians 3:22-4:1 (ESV) Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. [23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. [25] For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. [4:1] Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

1 Peter 2:18-21 (ESV) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. [19] For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. [20] For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. [21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

2. If you lived in the south in the mid-1800s, and you knew the Scriptures, why would you be opposed to slavery ... biblically? Hold that thought.

D. Here is what we Christians need to get.

1. Our greatest problem is that we are not right with God (sin has separated us). It is never true that our greatest problem is our circumstance (God's holiness).

John 20:30-31 (ESV) Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

2. The Bible is primarily a book that tells how we may be right with God (not a self-help book, not a science book, not a book about war or poverty or the environment).
3. Jesus Christ is a rock of offense. Following Christ means obeying Christ, which is a demonstration of our love for Him.

1 Peter 2:6-8 (ESV) For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." [7] So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," [8] and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

4. In eternity every wrong is somehow made right.
5. This life, compared to eternity is a mist, a vapor, a breath. In this life we are only pilgrims and sojourners. We are not yet home.

E. What matters most then is our relationship with God.

1. In heaven, you may expect to see slaves that on this earth were to be pitied for suffering like Christ, richly rewarded. Their circumstance was not ultimate.

F. Paul uses the same method for slaves and masters that he used for marriages and families. The one under subjection is spoken to first.

1. If followers do not follow well leaders do not matter.  
Ex: QB - halfback confusion. Or, more serious, mutiny is considered to be treason.
2. Christianity never eliminates roles (like socialism, feminism or egalitarianism). Chaos!

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 (ESV) Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. [18] Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. [19] For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. [20] Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. [21] Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. [22] For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. [23] You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. [24] So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

F. So by now you're thinking I don't care about slavery. Or, worse, I'm for it.

1. What I'm for is justice and love and mercy and freedom. But I know this life, while important, is not ultimate. The way we live now matters in eternity.  
Ex: Wilberforce (England 1800) responded to slavery in a culture where the gospel had swept through (Whitefield and Wesley). A great model (not French and US).

## II. Slaves (employees) have a responsibility before God.

A. Six action items.

1. Obey with fear and trembling (respect).
2. With a sincere heart as you would Christ.
3. Not by way of eye-service (only when the manager is watching) as people-pleasers.
4. As servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.
5. Rendering service as to the Lord, not to man.
6. Knowing ... that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord whether slave or free. Your circumstance is not ultimate.

B. Conclusion: Christians should be the very best employees.

1. We are not the most gifted but the hardest working because we work for Christ.  
Ex: Men - on our jobs we work hard and honestly and God gets glory.  
Ex: In Alcorn's book *Safely Home* ... the best street sweeper... jail ... outreach.  
Ex: Moms - changing diapers, cleaning vomit, cooking, cleaning, dishes is for Christ.

Matthew 25:33-40 (ESV) And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' [40] And the King will answer

them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

2. Our work does not have a sacred - secular distinction. All of our work is done unto Jesus Christ for His pleasure and glory.

Ex: If we clean it is as if Christ were coming, if we help a neighbor it as if we help Christ, we lay down our lives for His glory. We die to self and we win.

### III. Masters (employers) also have a responsibility before God.

A. Three action items.

1. Do the same to your slaves (servants or employees). Treat others as you would be treated the Golden Rule).
2. No threats (as husbands love wives, as parents do not exasperate kids, no threats of punishment).
3. Knowing that you have the same master in heaven and He is not partial (every Christian is rewarded according to what they have done).

B. Paul writes this appeal to Philemon regarding a runaway slave named Onesimus (in trouble).

Philemon 1:17-21 (ESV) So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. [18] If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. [19] I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. [20] Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. [21] Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

1. The way we serve (whether in charge or not) paves the way for the gospel. You will stand out like a shining light because it simply is not the norm in our time.
2. Be ready to answer for the hope you have which informs and inspires your labor.

### Close

A. One day we stand before the Lord and we will receive a reward from Him for our labors. They are not in vain, no matter how trivial or small.

1. Therefore, work with your heavenly Master in view.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV) Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

2. Now you know the work of the Lord is very broad. I pray that we are the very best at our jobs whether we are over or beneath others. It is the will of God.

### Pray

Now may He who has rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, fill you with all knowledge so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God. *Benedictions*, p 54