

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 24)

Ephesians 6:5-9

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Some claim the Bible is irrelevant for modern life, but in Ephesians we see Paul addresses every important relationship that most of us have in our lives today. He addresses the relationship between us and God (1:3-6, 2:4-7). He also addresses the relationship between believers (2:14-18, 4:1-3, 31-32). Paul addresses the relationship between husbands and wives (5:25-27, 33) and between parents and children (6:1-4), as we saw last week. Now he goes on to address the relationship between employers and employees in 6:5-9.

In Paul's day, the three major relationships within the household were between husbands and wives, parents and children, and slaves and masters. Slavery at that time wasn't necessarily like how slavery was in the United States. In Roman society, slaves were often like indentured servants. Many people chose to be slaves for a certain period time because it offered a better life than being on the streets. There was an understanding that during the period of servitude the slave would serve the master and the master would provide for the slave. Think about how in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the rebellious second son returned to his father considering that even the servants didn't go hungry. So it's not a stretch to translate this relationship to that of employers and employees today. Note that Paul neither promotes nor condemns slavery, but addresses the attitude that slaves and masters should have in the position they find themselves. And this attitude applies to us in our workplaces as well.

In Paul's time, slaves already obeyed their masters, as was required. But Paul's instructions provide a new attitude and motivation for this submission, which comes from our relationship with God through Jesus. In v. 5 he mentions an attitude of "fear and trembling," which is a reference to the appropriate attitude towards God mentioned in Psalm 2:11. This trembling isn't the fear that God will destroy us, but the reverence that comes from acknowledging that He has the power and authority to do so, which allows us to better appreciate His mercy. Likewise we should have an attitude of respect towards our bosses, acknowledging the authority that has been given to them. Paul reinforces this idea again in vv. 5-7. He says that we should serve our masters as we would serve Christ, as slaves of Christ, and as if we were serving the Lord not men. Overall, he says four times that our relationship with Jesus should

impact how we treat our employers. Like slaves already obeyed, some of us already serve our bosses well, but now our motivation must be our relationship with Jesus.

However, many of us compartmentalize our lives, separating our work life from our church life. I met a Christian on the golf course whose language and anger during the game was completely divorced from his relationship with Jesus. Likewise how many of us wear a different mask at work than at church? For those in school, how many put on a different face at school than at church? You know what is right, that's why you switch masks at church. But which is your real self? Paul says that it can't be like this. Your relationship with Jesus must permeate your entire life.

The second point Paul makes to slaves is that when they serve, their heart also must be in the right place. Again the fear and trembling in v. 5 is an attitude of respect, from the heart. The heart must match the behavior. You shouldn't be submissive in front of your boss but undermine them behind their back. Paul also says that our service shouldn't be by way of eye-service. This is the idea of performing when being watched but not when no one is looking. We tend to work hard only when we can be recognized for it, but not when no one can see. In Zoom meetings it's so tempting to become preoccupied because nobody can see your screen. We perform when our boss is present, but not when they're absent. But Jesus says it's better to be the son that resists his father's commands but eventually goes out and obeys, than the one who agrees with the command but then goes away and disobeys. Similarly Paul goes on to say we shouldn't be people pleasers, but must obey from the heart and with good will. Overall he says five times that our obedience must be from the heart, not just on the surface. It's about our attitude.

Finally, Paul addresses masters in v. 9. In his day, masters often assumed that God favored them because they were given a position of privilege. Paul tells them to check their hearts. God is master over both servants and masters, and He doesn't privilege masters over servants. He is impartial. So if you are an employer or boss, do you have this air of privilege? Do you threaten subordinates? Do you throw them under the bus, treating them as means for your own advancement? Both employers and employees are answerable to God. Whatever position you are in, your relationship with Jesus must impact how you treat people. Don't just do the right thing when people are watching. Have a sincere heart that serves others, as servants of

Jesus, not as slaves to your own desires. Evaluate yourself. May the Holy Spirit convict us and change us from within.