

Slaves, Masters, Employees and Bosses

(Ephesians 6:5-9)

I. Work in the Context of Serving Christ

All 5 verses put this human relationship in the context of our relationship to Christ

II. Slavery

Still around today

1. In Rome in the first century

- up to 60 million; perhaps 1/3 of the inhabitants of the Roman empire.
- slaves were generally treated brutally
- slaves were often skilled laborers

2. In Old Testament times

a. God did not give commands to establish nor abolish slavery, but to regulate it in a more humane manner

1. Hebrews with Hebrew slaves

- a. Were to be treated well - Leviticus 25:39–41
- b. Could only serve for 6 years – Exod. 21:2
- c. When released, to be given generous supplies – Deut. 15:12-17

2. Hebrews with Gentile slaves – Lev. 25:44-46

3. Gentiles with Hebrew slaves. – Lev. 47-54

4. Rights extended to slaves – Exod. 21

God's Law extended to slaves:

- the right to keep a wife (verse 3),
- the right to not be sold to foreigners (verse 8)
- the right to be adopted into a family by marriage (verse 9)
- the right to food and clothing (verse 10)
- The law also limited masters in their use of corporeal punishment (verses 20, 26–27).
- Rest on the Sabbath: Deut. 5:14-15
- Celebration of festivals: Deut. 16:11-12
- Kidnapping/abduction for enslavement was punishable by death - Ex 21:16
- Escaped slaves were not to be handed back to their masters. Deut. 23:15-16

3. New Testament Instruction on Slavery

- Emphasis on personal righteousness rather than social reform

a. Masters admonished on the fair and just treatment of their slaves.

Ephesians 6:9; Col. 4:1

- b. **Jesus and the apostles did not outright condemn slavery but proclaimed the gospel that transformed lives and cultures**
- c. **The seeds of the emancipation of slaves are in the Bible which teaches:**
 - all men are created by God and made in His image - Genesis 1:27
 - kidnapping and selling a person is punishable by death - Exodus 21:16; 1 Timothy 1:8–10)
 - a slave can truly be “a brother in the Lord” - Philemon 1:16
 - Slaves and masters are one in Christ. - Gal. 3:28
 - The issue of slavery is not to dominate our consideration of life. But slavery is to be left behind if possible - 1 Cor. 7:21-23

III. Application to the Workplace

A. Employees

- 1. **Obey in our actions**
- 2. **Fearing the Lord** (*with fear and trembling*) – Col 3:22
- 3. **With a sincere heart**
 - a. **Even if they’re not good, gentle, just, or reasonable** - 1 Peter 2:18-23; 1 Tim. 6:1
 - b. **Even if they are fellow believers** - 1 Tim. 6:2
- 4. **As if serving Christ**
- 5. **Not just when being watched by our bosses**
- 6. **Doing God’s will (not just the boss’s will)**
 - a. **Carrying out God’s will usually helps us serve our boss better**
 - b. **Exception: if he or she is wanting us to do something sinful** T
 - c. **Doesn’t mean you witness and talk theology when you are being paid to do a particular task**
- 7. **Looking to God’s reward**

B. Bosses

- 1. **Do the same: serve your employees with good will from the heart as if serving Christ**
- 2. **Stop threatening**
- 3. **Remember that you both have the same Master** (fear & trembling)
- 4. **He is not partial** (impressed, intimidated, or biased) **to one’s higher position in the company**

