

Part 12: Submitting to Jesus in the Workplace

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For those of you who have been with us as we have been working through the book of Ephesians, we are to the point of Paul's letter where he is pressing the internal truths of the gospel into the external actions of our lives.

Paul is protecting the church in Ephesus, and us today from a privatization of the gospel. Believing and applying the gospel isn't coming out of Kohls with a new wardrobe, it's coming out of the grave with new life. This is what our church is all about, gospel change for all of life. Things are drastically different because of what Jesus has done for us.

As our faith has become increasingly privatized today, our culture has effectively convinced many self-professing Christians that they can go through their weekly rhythm without ever doing anything out of the influence of their new life in Jesus. But in Ephesians Paul says that at a basic level we should at least be going to church, for it's in the church that we experience the wonderful promises, encouragement and plan of God. For Paul, Christianity has deeply personal ramifications which express themselves in the corporate body of the church.

Knowing that Christianity restores us not only to God, but also to others, Paul has been pressing the gospel into that relational space. What I love about Paul's work here is that he has been showing us how the gospel changes some of the most ordinary relationships we might have. The gospel not only changes how we spend our Sunday's or Community Groups, but it changes how we view dating, marriage, and parenting. He's taken something that often only gets two hours of consideration a week, and he's brought it into our home life. The influence of the gospel is growing.

But let's be realistic, even if our home life and our Sunday's are different, there is still a large swath of our time which can remain untouched by the gospel. For instance, we sleep. On average that's eight hours a night, or what is roughly a third of our lives. Then on top of that, we go to college, or we go get jobs. That's another 8 hours, another third of our lives. It would seem that distinctly Christian living is at best narrowed down to one third of our lives.

But the Bible has more to say on these. In fact did you know that the Christian's sleep should be distinct? Everyone sleeps because they're tired. Christians sleep because they know they can rest. There is a difference there right? Everyone gets tired and eventually needs to sleep. But the Christian gets to rest in their sleep. Why? Because they know that when they close their eyes, God's got the world under control. Sleep reminds us that we are not God, and that we serve a God who never sleeps. Look at **Psalm 127:1-2**. For the believer rest is part of our worship. It is a gift from God and we should learn to see it as such.

Now we are back to 2/3's of our life being distinctly influenced by our salvation, but what of the other 1/3, our work? Well this is where Paul lands the plane today. In this passage Paul completes his section on the relational distinctions that Christians should have by speaking about and to those who work. What if I told you that God cares about your time at work? That your time at work, whatever that looks like, is part of God's wonderful plan to bless his people, love others and glorify his name?

Do you think that perhaps you may be willing to see certain parts of your life as gospel-influenced, and other parts as gospel-absent? I think that for most of us, this is the workplace. Think of it this way, if somehow the part of your body which believed the gospel was removed from you tonight and deleted from your brain, would you work any differently come Monday?

In speaking to bondservants and to masters today, Paul wants us to see how visibly distinct the gospel should make all of us at work. In this text he is going to show us two things to help us get there **A Gospel view of service**, the second is **A Gospel view of authority**.

Now before we get into the text a bit more, I want to provide a quick point of historical context here. If you have a Bible with you, you might look at the first word you see and for some of you that word is slave, and for some of you that word is bondservant. This is because there is one Greek word, the word "doulos," which is used throughout the New Testament to refer at times to servants, to bondservants, and to slaves.

The word carries with it the economic idea of someone being under the authority of another for the purpose of service. Now during the time of Paul's writing, the Roman Empire included roughly 60,000,000 slaves. That means nearly one out of every three individuals would fall in some way shape or form under the title of "doulos."

The reason why translators wrestle to translate this term is because the experience of a slave in that time was drastic. On one end many slaves shared the same social status as their master, they were upper class, educated, owned property and would actually be advanced socially because of their position. Others were more common servants, working to pay off a debt, and living with the family they served. And yes, there were others who were slaves in the worst condition. However by this time in history such treatment of slaves was becoming less and less common due to Roman reforms. As Paul wrote this letter, most slaves were being freed by the age of thirty.

So what's important to understand as we read this text that Paul is not condoning or condemning slavery here because that's not his point. For Paul, to imagine a culture so advanced to work without a slave economy would be as far-fetched for us to think of a society so advanced to work on the surface of Mars. What he is doing instead is speaking to those who are slaves and speaking to those who are masters and showing how the gospel shapes the current situation that they are in.

In other places Paul encourages slaves to seek their freedom if they can, but here Paul is helping them, in whatever situation they are in, to understand the hope of the gospel in their economic service hood. This is why the principles here are analogous to our work place in the modern world. So when you hear bondservant, think employee, and when you hear master, think employer or manager.

So with that said let's take a look at our first point today: **A Gospel view of service**. And let's read together **Ephesians 6:5-8**.

Now what we will see on this text by the end is that Paul spends way more time speaking to bondservants than to masters, and that's probably because Paul knows that the church is made up of more bondservants than masters. Contrary to what culture might have you think, the church was generally the most welcoming of all social constructs. Paul expects not only woman and children to be involved in the life of the church, but also slaves. Because the gospel sees the eyes of faith not the station in life.

And it might seem at this point that Paul's commands to employees is rather obvious and bland: obey. That's not really novel. But what comes after Paul's command to obey is unique. Did you notice the basis for obedience in the work place: obey...as you would Christ (vs. 5), as bondservants of Christ doing the will of God (vs. 6), service as to the Lord (vs. 8), and lastly receiving back from the Lord (vs. 9).

Paul has done this three times now and it shouldn't be a surprise to us. Husbands and wives, to understand marriage you need to understand the gospel. Children and parents, to understand parenting you need to understand the gospel. Bondservants and masters, to understand service you need to understand the gospel. And you really do.

Because in one sense we can almost say to Jesus, "You've never met my boss." Serving him is so unlike serving God. Even more, because this text is about service and not just authority, it also applies to how we view our unruly customers or clients.

For many of us it would be easy to serve our bosses if they were like Jesus, but that's just not the case. But have you considered the gospel? Do you remember what Jesus did for you? Consider how Paul speaks of Jesus in **Philippians 2:5-8**. Jesus in submission to God became a servant to us. In his desire to obey his true master he willingly served those who were entirely unworthy of service: namely the people who would later kill him.

The gospel shatters the expectations of who is worthy of our service. We were totally unworthy of Jesus' sacrificial service to us. But he came and served us because he loved us and wanted to obey his Father. His service towards us enabled us to believe the gospel, don't you think that our service in our work place might enable some to at least see the gospel?

In 1848 an escaped slave and believer named Fredrick Douglass wrote to his former master informing him that he was going to use this man to expose the hypocritical heart of American Christianity at the time. Douglass was going to start a national campaign against this man to bring America to repentance over the way they "trafficked souls." But near the end of his letter, and I want you to hear how big the gospel can be in this, he says he wishes his former master no ill will.

In fact he goes on to say this: **In doing this, I entertain no malice toward you personally. There is no roof under which you would be more safe than mine, and there is nothing in my house which you might need for your comfort, which I would not readily grant. Indeed, I should esteem it a privilege to set you an example as to how mankind ought to treat each other.**

Only a big gospel can change hearts like this. But that's what we have in Jesus. The word Paul uses here when he says sincerity of heart is literally "singularity of heart as you would Christ." The singular motivation for service in the workplace is the service which Jesus extended us at the behest of his Father. The protestant work ethic doesn't start with ethics, it starts with worship.

What does it look like to have such a singular focus in your work? Paul give three practical points that we should apply. First he says we need to see *Work as the Will of God*.

That's what he means when he says this in **Ephesians 6:6**.

I remember at one of my jobs, the distinct change which would occur when corporate was scheduled to visit. There were parts of the store that had total make-overs when this would happen.

I imagine that this is true in small ways in your own work life. You all know how easy it is to check social media, browse the internet or joke around with your friends when the boss is gone. But when he comes back we clatter back to our keyboards or stations to make it look like we were working.

On a secular level this is doing things right. We look like we are good workers. But from a Biblical perspective this misses the whole point. We were made to work. God cares about our work. It is the will of God that we would work.

Remember way back in the Garden of Eden, in the most perfect of all worlds, where there was perfection between God and man, man and man, and man and nature. Remember what God gave Adam to do? To work! Christians shouldn't mimic culture in attempting to escape work, we should take up the biblical mandate to embrace it for the glory of God.

As Adam physically extended the garden he made more space for people to experience God's perfect presence. In our fallen world we no longer have a physical space to extend, but in a way don't our jobs reflect glimpses of this reality?

If all you care about is pleasing your boss, then it will make sense to dodge and duck your way into eye-pleasing. But if our goal is to glorify God, then our work takes on a whole new meaning. If you are at Taco Bell, you might have by secular standards one of the most menial jobs. But consider what it is you are doing: you are providing food to people. What a great reminder of Jesus who calls himself the bread of life! More than that you are working at a relatively inexpensive place to eat. This means that yes, you will have to put up with the drunken college students, but it also means that you are in a place where for some families this is all they can afford for a night out with their family.

What a great reminder of the service that God gave us in Jesus. We came to God with nothing, but through Jesus we are treated like God's very son. And we received far more value than a burrito. Do you see this God glorifying service?

What does it look like for you to find the will of God in your work? Think this week of the places where your job either points us towards what life will be like in Heaven, or solves a problem of sin here on earth. Let that motivate your labor.

Secondly Paul says that gospel work learns to see *Work as the worship of God*. Look at **Ephesians 6:7**.

Because our work is the will of God, then our work is also the worship of God. Obeying God is worship. This is a different posture than gritted teeth and grumbled words. Where the first part focuses on our hands, Paul here focuses on our hearts.

You might think that your assigned duties are menial and empty, but God wants you to see how you might render it as service not to the wind of the workplace but to the God of the universe. God cares about your work!

I have another Taco Bell illustration because, why not. We had a GCF student who worked at the Taco Bell on east Broadway. And here is a little Hollywood secret: Kevin Costner eats at Missoula's east

Broadway Taco Bell. He said one day they looked out and saw him ordering food in their lobby, and the whole place went abuzz.

You can imagine that whomever was making Costner's crunch wrap supreme did not do so with apathy. Why? Because it was a special service.

This is the point Paul is making with our work. Our work is given to men, but it is done as to the Lord. I wonder how our attitudes would be different if before we got out of our car in the morning that we prayed to God saying: "Dear Lord, help me to see this labor I offer today as an act of worship to you. Help me to not settle for eye-service, but worship in all that I do so that others may see my good works and glorify my Father in heaven."

I know in Missoula employers often groan at how hard it is to find good employees. It is my prayer that our church solves this by sending out men and women who are not only eager to work, but eager to worship with their work.

Lastly to the bondservant, Paul encourage us to learn to *Work for the reward of God*. Look with me at **Ephesians 6:8**.

At one point in my life I was the clean-up guy in a meat department. Which mean at the end of the day I was the one who had to scrub down all the meat cutting machines, clean out the grinders and pressure wash the walls. Most days, by the end I would be able to rub my nails over my cheeks and actually scrape off a thin coating of meat residue from my skin. In those moments, I thought what I'm sure you yourself have thought: I'm not paid enough for this.

But here we see the wonderful truth of the gospel: God rewards his people proportionally. Can you imagine how freeing this would have been to a slave in the time of Paul? They go to work, they try to honor God by working as worship, but at the end of the day their master withholds their pay, or pays them less than they would at another market. But here Paul says, God sees your good works and he promises to reward them. These works of obedience don't earn you salvation, but they do bring you greater blessing in your salvation.

There will be times in your work where the worldly return on whatever you are doing seems slim, but God sees your work and promises to reward you with the blessings for obedience. One of Jesus' commands to his disciples was to store up for themselves treasures in heaven and not treasures on earth. And here Paul reminds us that whether you flip burgers or homes, serve papers or platters, create spreadsheets or wealth, slave or free, God will reward you for your obedience rendered to him.

Your standing before God is not dependent upon your status in the workplace. In the church we should remind ourselves of the heavenly reality. One 19th century pastor said it well: **In this world some men are masters and some are slaves. In the next, these distinctions will cease. There the question will be, not, "Who is the master?" and "who the slave?" but "Who has done the will of God?"**

We work for rewards. Everyone gets that. You right now are working for a reward. But can your employer provide it? For many of us what lies behind the hope of our careers is a hope for something greater: financial peace, stability, salvation. Do you realize that only Jesus can provide those things for you? Jesus has pleased God for us, so that when we live for him we might reap the reward of doing the will of God.

In light of these practical points, the will of God, the worship of God and the reward of God, how does your Monday change this week? Where might God be calling you to repent and work for a greater master and a better reward at work?

Now Paul turns, with less words but more weight to masters, to employers or managers. And here we see our last point today: **A Gospel view of authority.**

If you are a person who has people under you, where you have a sense of authority over others, then heed Paul's words here: **Ephesians 6:9.**

In writing to those in economic authority, Paul wants you to see two things.

First he wants you to see that masters *lead by example*. He starts out by saying, "Masters, do the same to them."

Now, this isn't Marxism, God isn't eliminating structures of authority and power. How do we know that? Because Paul is still writing to masters and slaves. He doesn't erase structures of authority, but he does seek to redeem them with the gospel.

And in the master/servant economy Paul says that you masters must "do the same" to your employees? What is that? What is the "same thing" that you are to do?

You are to see your work to lead and oversee as part of God's will for your life. You are to see your oversight role and the product you produce as an act of worship to God. And you are to see that God holds the reward for those who please him. You set the tone for what you want to see at work. Do people want to work for you?

In other words just as you expect your employees to show respect and dignity to you, you must let the gospel shape your respect and grace you give to them. This is the principle of mutual submission that Paul has been applying since **Ephesians 5:21.**

If you think less of your employees because they are in fact your subordinate, then you have already missed this principle. You have already forgotten what Jesus' salvation models for you. John Calvin said it so well when he said: "**The world is fixed to set little value on the labors of slaves; but God esteems them as highly as the duties of kings.**"

If you really see that all work is God's work then shouldn't you manage God's workers in a way God would desire? And here you can see why this text, even though it doesn't condemn slavery is one of the texts used to abolish slavery. If masters treated men like this, the problems of slavery would dissolve. But because of our sinful hearts we often let the simplest positions of authority poison our hearts with prideful desires to harm instead of help.

This is why Paul closes with a bold statement at the end, the second thing Paul wants masters to be aware of is that masters *understand true authority*. Look back at **Ephesians 6:9.**

Paul's words to masters immediately reminds them that they are not immune from authority themselves. God is Lord over all, he is in heaven and he sees all. And you are under him.

Paul brings into view the idea of partiality. And with the idea of partiality comes the idea of divine judgment. Look at what Paul says in a similar passage in **Colossians 3:25**. This Master (Lord) is a righteous judge who will punish all who do wrong. All who do evil, all who threaten without end, all who abuse their power will be punished proportionally for their sin.

Now in our world today, it is one of the easiest times to preach the doctrine of eternal damnation. In our #MeToo world, we yearn for a God who does not consider the status of one as an exemption from their wrong doing.

Millionaire Jeffery Epstein was convicted in 2008 on charges of child prostitution. This past year Epstein was arrested again and charged with being a ringleader of a child-sex trafficking organization which supposedly included some of America's political elite. But before Epstein could testify, before he or anyone else could be potentially investigated and punished, he was found dead in his jail cell.

This sent our world into an outrage. Epstein skirted his own punishment and allowed others on this list to escape punishment as well. But here is the truth that Paul wants you in authority to know: you will not escape the punishment of God.

Just as Paul promises the bondservant that their good work is never unrewarded. So too Paul promises the powerful that their evil is never unpunished.

We cannot cry for justice without also crying out for a God who punishes all according to what they have done regardless of their power or position. In the economy of God wealth and status mean nothing when compared to your sins.

If you are an individual with relative power here on earth, know that your wealth, your power, and your position can do nothing to shield you from the justice of our Master. It cannot save you. And if the greatest resources of this world cannot help the elite, the rest of us must realize our helpless inability to insulate us from our sin as well.

This, my friends, is why we need Jesus. Employee or employer, there is only one way in which we do not get what our sins deserve. We need Jesus to be punished for us. That's the only justice which saves. Jesus pays the price for this partiality, and the result is grace. This is the gospel.

You see Jesus as the true "doulos" made a sacrifice of service so that all who come to him may receive this mercy. But Jesus is also the true authority for all who stand opposed to him will one day be judged by him.

And because of this, our whole life, our relationships, our work, our rest, should be drastically different. We have a gospel which saves us from everything thing so that in everything we might be distinct.

May this be true in our church.

