

Serve the Lord Christ

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Date: 28 June 2015

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[0:00] Well, our Lord speaks to us in his word. Ephesians chapter 6 is where we're going to begin tonight! And then we'll read a companion passage in Colossians 3.

! Ephesians 6 and verse 5. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

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. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

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.

Then over to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 22. Through the first verse of chapter 4. Colossians 3.22.

[1:19] Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, and do it not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward, it is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know you also have a master in heaven.

Well, who is the main man, the head honcho where you work? When he comes in, everyone snaps to, and everyone gets down to business, and everyone picks up the pace.

Maybe it's you. Well, do you have his picture, or her picture? Even if it's you, do you have that picture in mind?

[2:32] Now, erase him, and put in his place the Lord Jesus. And you have the heart of tonight's message.

Paul is teaching us how to live the Christian life. And he's talked to wives and husbands and children and fathers, and now he turns to the last two relationships within an ancient family, slaves and masters.

And so what we see is that Christ doesn't stay at home. Christ goes to work with us. He goes out onto that factory floor. He goes into that office building.

He goes into that business with us. He goes to work. And so being in Christ means that there's this fundamental change in which we need to operate.

If we are those people who are going to work, we are under authority. If we have people over us, and then it changes how we exercise our authority with those people who are under us at work.

[3:42] And so in the ancient world, that dynamic of being over some people or under some people sometimes took the form of slaves and masters.

So just at the beginning, I want to take a few moments to talk about slavery because you notice it doesn't say employees. It in fact does say slaves.

And maybe you wonder why didn't Paul tell the masters to release the slaves. Maybe that bothers you. Maybe you wish he would have said that.

Maybe it doesn't bother you. I don't know. But you could be thinking, whatever the case, I don't want to totally ignore it because indeed it doesn't say employees. It says slaves.

And that's a very different thing than what an employee is. So let's just take a few minutes and talk about slavery, especially in that world. I don't want this to be a history lesson or a history lecture, but I think I want you to get going in the right direction and have your mind squared away.

[4:49] It's hard to say how prevalent slavery was in Colossae. Not everyone had slaves. Actually, most people didn't have slaves. It wasn't as common as we usually think.

In the whole of the Roman Empire, about 10 to 15% of the population were slaves. So it wasn't tons and tons of people were slaves. Only 10 to 15%.

And the very wealthy owned most of them. The very wealthy owned the vast, vast, vast majority of them.

And so just like today, the so-called 1% has proportionally a greater amount of wealth than everyone else. So it was no different back then. There's nothing new under the sun. One thing that was very different about slavery back then as compared to slavery that we are aware of or we know about in our country, in America in the 19th century, is that race had nothing to do with it.

And so we need to be careful to totally erase that idea. Being black had nothing to do with being a slave in Rome. Black and white had nothing to do with it all. Probably, statistically, for some historical reasons, most slaves would have been white people.

[6:04] They would have looked like you. So it had nothing to do with it. You didn't become a slave because you were from Africa. You weren't slave material because you were black.

And that is what is so horrible about what even some Christians have said in defense of American slavery. Some very smart men, and I would even say some even godly men, said some very evil and very wrong things in defense of American slavery.

They said blacks were human, but God gave them a nature that was given to slavery. And so it was just this natural thing. God's ideal for the black race was to be a slave.

And in reality, it was just a horrific, theological self-justification for what they wanted. Now, that wasn't what was going on here.

Most people were slaves because they were taken in battle. Or they became so poor they couldn't pay off their debts. And so they became slaves in that way. Or they were simply born into it.

[7:07] Race had nothing to do with it. And then the other thing we want to, I want you to be aware of, that a slave was considered to be a part of the family, a part of the household.

And that's why Paul, when he's talking to wives and husbands and children and fathers, he naturally goes right into slaves and masters. Because slaves and masters, that was considered a part of the household.

They fell under the rule, the protection of the pater familias, the head and man. And that's why Paul puts this relationship right along the rest. This is what it meant to be a part of a family in ancient Colossae.

It's very different from our world. And it's hard for us to wrap our minds around. Now, I don't want to say that everything was all peaches and cream, and it was wonderful, and there was no problems, and there was no abuses.

That's just simply not true. It was sometimes very bad. And just like there were bad masters and bad fathers, there were bad bosses today, and bad fathers today.

[8:11] People are different. And given that much power and authority over someone, people did abuse it. Slaves did have some protection.

And as the years went by, the Roman Empire gave them more and more protection and more and more legal rights. But it was nowhere ever close to what we would call right and fair.

It wasn't an ideal situation. And of course, the result was that a lot of slaves did the bare minimum, and they fought against it, and they only did what they had to do to make sure they didn't get into trouble.

You understand that mentality of just doing the bare minimum, just enough to stay out of trouble. But into that nasty world, and into that antagonistic relationship, an unproductive relationship, an unhelpful and unloving relationships, Christ came, and he began to change people.

He began to change masters' hearts, and he began to change slaves' hearts, and he changed relationships. And so now in Colossae, on this Lord's Day, in which this letter is first being read, there are men and women sitting together, and one is not above the other.

[9:30] And there are fathers, there are parents, and there are children, and children are not afterthoughts. They're not subhuman until they grow up. And then there were slaves and masters, and in Christ, one was not above the other.

One did not have any sort of spiritual benefit of being a master or being a slave. One wasn't special or better off spiritually than the other.

Paul in Galatians says, No, in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, for we are all one in Christ. One of the wonderful things about the early Christian church is that many pastors actually were slaves.

Some of the most well-known pastors of the early church came from the slaves. And so Christianity sowed the seeds of the destruction of slavery, but Christ did it from the inside out.

And maybe we would want him to do it a different way, but this is the way he did it. Christ did it by changing hearts and minds and people. He brought them into a new reality. He brought the heavenly reality to these people.

[10:43] And now in Jesus Christ, because Christ is all and is in all, I'm no longer saying, I'm better and I deserve this position, or I'm lowly and I'm a horrible person because of this position.

But in him, Christ is all and is in all. And before him and because of him, the ugly things of this world began to fall away. And so here we are, we're sitting here, and slavery is repulsive to us.

And it's unimaginable to us. Because for years and years, our culture has sat at the feet of Christ, and we've listened, and we've learned, and we begin to think the way he thinks about people.

And it was Christians who were always in the forefront of destroying slavery. Not only in that world, but in our own country. And it started out as a seed.

But wherever people began to take the word of God seriously, and I want to, not just naming, saying I'm a Christian, but they took the word of God seriously, and they started to listen, and believe it, and to put it into practice.

[11:51] Wherever the word of God takes control, slavery slowly dies away. Now, again, I don't want this to be a history lecture. But I do want you to understand what the context was.

but this is for you. All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. We don't have slaves today, but there is the same dynamic here.

Some of you are employees. And some of you are employers. Some of you are in charge when you go to work. And some of you are not. Some of you have a limited authority over some people.

And other people have authority over you. So God has called some of you to work for people, and God has called some of you to rule over, to manage people.

And so, while it's a little bit different, the dynamics are still there. And so, we can rightfully say, what does this word of God have to say to me? I'm not a slave, but, or I'm not a master, but what is the word of God teaching me?

[12:58] Well, the main point here is, is, to both sets of people, employees, or employers, Christ says, you are mine. You are mine now.

I bought you with a price. And you're working for me. The heart of this whole passage is Colossians 3, chapter 3, verse 24. Look at the second half of that.

If you can take this little bit away, then you'll understand the whole sermon. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. It's the Lord Christ you are serving.

That's true of employees. That's true of slaves. That's true of masters. In chapter 4, verse 1, he says, masters, you remember too that you have a master in heaven.

Jesus is saying to both groups, I am the Lord. I am the master. You are all my servants. And so, there is this equality.

[14:00] There is this parity here that we both answer to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the reason that we're going to do what we do is because of him. And so, what does it look like to serve Christ as an employee?

That's the second point. What does it look like to serve Christ as an employee? What do you do and why should you do it? What should you do and why should you do it?

Well, Paul gives each person one thing to concern himself with, one thing to walk away with.

Remember, wives submit, husbands, love.

So, what's this one thing for us as employees? What are we to focus on? This one idea. It's simply this.

Our first priority is obey. So, when you go to work tomorrow, the first thing on your list is obey.

[14:56] Obey. A lot of people think it's cool, it's tough to do your own thing, to drag your feet, to fight the man. Christ puts his hand on our shoulder and he says, obey.

Obey. Obey in everything. Underline that. Obey in everything. Not just what you like, not just the best parts, not the things that please you, not what you think is just fair, not what you want to do.

Obey in everything. Maybe you've heard that saying about some pets that they don't obey me, but sometimes they do agree with me.

Have you heard that? Maybe you have a dog or a cat like that where they never obey you, but sometimes what you're telling them to do is what they want to do and so they'll do it. Christ doesn't call us to agree with our bosses, to go along with them, so to speak, if it pleases us.

He calls us to obey them in everything, to put ourselves under them, to do what they say because they said it. So, obey. Next he says, with sincerity.

[16:09] That means honestly, from the heart, with singleness of the heart, not just when they're watching you, not just when they're around, but you're doing it the same when they are there and the same when they are not there.

Why? Because you're doing it with sincerity. The motivation is not that they're looking at me. The motivation is coming from within you, from your heart. And so you go to work and you say, I want to obey and that's that motion, that movement, that desire is coming from your heart.

You want to do them good. You want to do your boss, your company, your business good. And so let me just say that.

We should be faithful and we should be honest at work and work hard because we want to do them good from the heart.

Love, love is as important at work as it is at home. And maybe you haven't thought about that. Maybe you think the love thing is something that you do for your family or your friends but love doesn't have anything to do with work.

[17:23] But love is as important, this desire to do good to others is as important at work as it is at home. And so, one eye is on them. That's what this means with sincerity.

You want to serve them from your heart. One eye is on them saying, how can I bless them? Not how, what can I get out of this?

How can I bless them? How can I do good to them? And then the other eye is on the Lord saying, He is here. He's present. He's spoken and His word carries weight with me.

And so, because I have the, I'm in this position of being reverent before the Lord, He wants me to obey and so I'm going to obey because I fear the Lord. That's godliness going to work.

That's the true way you can measure what kind of attitude, what kind of fear do you have? Not the religious things that you do, but when you go, when you leave this place and you go out into the secular world, does Jesus come along with you and you have Him in mind?

[18:26] And His word is echoing in your ears. And you're doing what He says because you fear Him. So you obey in everything. You obey with sincerity from the heart. And third, you obey wholeheartedly.

You obey with all that you are. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. What does that mean? No reservations. You're not holding anything back.

You're not being double-minded thinking, well, maybe He won't carry out. No, you trust Him with all of your heart. Or love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. What does it mean to love God with your whole heart?

Nothing's holding, you're holding nothing back. There's no reservations. You're keeping nothing in reserve, all that I am for all that He is. And so that's how Paul, that's how God wants us to obey those people that are above us at work.

So that means with zeal, with enthusiasm, with excitement, with intention, with purpose, with love, I am doing it for them with all of my heart.

[19:30] So what does that look like practically? What does it look like practically? One, be on time.

Be on time. Christians should never be late unless it's an emergency. You wouldn't roll up to heaven's gate five minutes late telling Jesus that you overslept.

And it is the Lord Christ you are serving. Two, don't be the last one back from break, from lunch. You know what I mean? Or you're dawdling. And you're the last one and you're talking to this person and that person or you're doing all this personal stuff on the way.

The world is full of dawdlers, slow walkers, strolling back late. You don't serve Jesus in that way. Third, three.

[20:32] We have a poem at our house. We teach it to our children. Might be part of school. I don't know what it is. It goes like this. Work while you work. Play while you play.

This is the way to be happy every day. Work while you work. I have this exercise program that I'm not doing right now. Because it's too hard.

This guy, when it gets tough, when it gets rough, it's getting hard, he starts yelling at you and he says, come on! Dig deep! Work, people! Work!

Because it's hard and you gotta work. You just can't show up. So, work at it like you would work if Jesus gave you that job to do.

Work at it like, Jesus gave you that job to do. The reality is, he did give you that job to do. So, imagine, Jesus comes to you.

[21 : 33] He is risen. He is glorious. He has something to tell you. He comes to you and he says, I have a job for you to do. A place that you can serve me.

A place that I have a particular thing that I want you to do. I don't know how long you're gonna be there, but this is what I want you to do for a while. And we wonder, oh boy, what can it be? Is he gonna send me away to China?

Is he gonna send me to some foreign field? Is he gonna make me a pastor, a pastor's wife, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher? And then he takes you to a factory and he puts you in front of a machine.

He gives you some tools to work with and he says, run this machine for me. Do these people good. See these people here? See this company here?

Work for them. Work for them. Or maybe he takes you to a computer and he says, I want you to be writing code here, to be programming.

[22 : 33] I want you to create databases and tax programs and stores and graphic design and I want you to work for this company and I want you to do them good. Grow their business.

Serve them. Make them prosper. Well, it's not China. It's not preaching. It's not teaching. It's not something obviously that we would think Jesus would give us to do.

But nevertheless, that's what he gives most of us to do. And so my question is, would you do it for Jesus with all your heart? If he gave you that little thing or would you say, no, I want something better.

No. You would do it with all your heart. You would do it with excitement and enthusiasm and purpose and love and when you got tired, you would say, but I remember who I'm doing this for. I'm working at it with all of my heart. And so the measure is not the minimum. The measure is not what other people are doing. The measure is what Jesus deserves.

[23 : 31] The measure is what Jesus deserves. So that's the key idea for employees. Obey. Obey in everything. Obey with sincerity. Obey wholeheartedly as unto the Lord.

And then we have the reasons why. The motivations. Because, you know what? We need motivations. We need these things. And these are some sweet promises.

And they are some wonderful truths that should really excite us. In verse 24, you find the first motivation. You will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

an inheritance. Now, slaves were part of the household. And this is what we're not very familiar with this culture and so we don't understand how surprising what Paul is saying.

Slaves were a part of the household. They were part of the family. But they could never, ever, ever be an heir. You couldn't legally adopt them and then be an heir.

[24 : 38] It was against the law. It's not just that they didn't have a way of doing it. It was they saw that you could do it and they didn't want you to do it. There was never a way to legally do it. There was no future hope for these slaves.

So here they are. They're working for this family. And you know what they're going to get for it in the long run? Nothing. There's no inheritance.

There's no, they're not being treated as a child. And this is what makes this so sweet, especially if you were a slave back in Colossi. Christ says, I'm your master now.

And you're going to be a part of my family. And though you don't get anything from them, I will give you an inheritance, a reward. Sometimes work seems like we're getting nowhere.

And we're spinning our wheels. And, you know, we all see that in the end, a lot of it's just going to be undone and redone.

[25 : 44] And it can be very frustrating. And if you are in the middle of that struggle, Jesus says, lift up your head. Your work doesn't die here.

It doesn't even die when you die. Your work goes ahead. And Jesus gives you a reward for it, an inheritance, land, property, position, a place, everything a slave never could have.

Jesus says, I'm going to give it to you as a reward. So remember, you're working for me now. And that's the second motivation.

Why obey? Because we're doing it for him. That should be exciting. You are going to work for Jesus. We're serving him.

him. So he comes to our workplace. And he says, all of your work here, I take it to myself. It's mine.

[26:41] I take it as done personally to me. I'll take it. It's not just work because it's the right thing to do, although that's true. Jesus makes it personal.

And he says, this is for me. So we think, or we have the tendency to think that really the scope of Jesus' concern is the religious stuff, the righteous stuff, the not sinning stuff.

But what about my work? What about my computer programming? What about my sales? What about management?

What about banking and finances? What about RVs and trucks? What about teaching? What about whatever you do? What about those things? The Bible doesn't say anything about those things, but it does.

It says, it's the Lord Christ. It's the Lord Christ that you are serving. And that's why we have to go back to what we did at the very beginning, and that's why we have to get that main man that we had in our mind and erase him and put in Jesus and his place.

[27:53] Because it is Jesus that we are doing this for. And that should be of great encouragement. I don't know about you, but it's probably true of you.

I've worked for people that really were not good people. They weren't nice people. It's hard to serve them because you know how sinful and selfish and wicked they really are and worldly and all the rest.

Christ. And Jesus comes in and he sweetly says, you know what, all that work you do for them, I'll take it to me. I'll make it mine. And when you work hard for them, you are loving me.

You are serving me. You are blessing me. You're doing it for me. And so men and women, when you go to work, you are serving Jesus as directly as the angels in heaven.

man, they are closer to his throne than you are, but they are not closer to his heart and your work is done for him just as much as their work is done for him.

[28:58] Isn't that exciting? That changes the way that I look at work. That changes the way that I go to work.

It sort of takes the top off of things, doesn't it? It's not the small crowded world anymore where my work only has some sort of meaning for now. No, it goes right up and Jesus says, this is mine.

So don't miss it. You have six days to go to work. You have six days to serve Jesus. And he takes everyone and he claims it as his own.

Six days to serve. And when you serve them, you serve him. Now here's the third motivation. You see that in verse 25. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong and there is no favoritism. Now he's talking about judgment and justice here. It's not entirely clear exactly who he's talking about. But just as there is a reward for what is right, for doing what is right, there is a promise, judgment, for doing wrong.

[30:09] Now it's clear who he's talking to, he's talking to the slaves. But I don't think, it seems that he's not talking about the slaves, but he's talking now about their masters.

And that's how he talks about it in Ephesians. And the idea is, and I think the idea that the slave would think I'm going to receive preferential treatment, or I'm going to, I don't think a slave would naturally think that he is going to be treated preferentially, that he's going to be a favorite.

Slavery and favoritism don't go hand in hand very well. But I think what Paul is trying to encourage them with is this, it can be very disheartening, very disheartening to be mistreated at work, and to be powerless, especially for them, they had less power than any of you have, and to be wronged, to be abused, and I think you all know how hard it is to go to work when you are being mistreated by those in power, and I think what Paul is doing here is simply saying as a way of encouragement to the slaves, if you are wrong, if your master wrongs you, don't take vengeance yourself, don't get hung up on this, don't lose heart, God doesn't have favorites, your master won't get a free ride, the Roman courts for the most part gave masters a free ride, your master's money, his power, his position,

Paul is saying it won't save them from the Lord's hand when he judges, so are you mistreated, does it feel like you're at a dead end and you have no recourse, there's just no way that you can get out of this, well the Lord will make it right in the end, there is no favorites, and so don't get hung up and don't get bogged down in bitterness, where you're just replaying the wrongs over and over again in your head, and your work suffers and your love suffers and you just think about how unfair it is, you don't have to give in to that, and the reason is that Jesus holds out this promise that you know what, I'll make it right and there's no favorites, they won't get away with anything, your master's position, or even your position, it won't mean anything to Jesus, he judges with justice across the board, so keep hoping, keep working, keep at it.

Now, very quickly, Paul's final words are masters, masters, employers, to employers, to bosses, to owners, to those on top, to the one thing he gives you to think about is provide, provide, provide, provide what is right and fair, the minimum wage is not the standard, what is right and fair is the standard, required, now, he doesn't tell us exactly what these things mean, but this is something you're going to have to work out before God, what is right and fair, and so if God looked over your shoulder, would he be impressed with the way that you are treating those under you, and so right and fair, that means not as tools, but as people, not as machines to just burn out and destroy, but as people, not someone to be taken advantage of, not to be bullied, but to be provided for, cared for, see,

[33 : 54] God calls masters to reflect him, he is the one who gives provision and grace and help to all of his servants, and yet he says, now if you're going to be like me, if you're going to have the same kind of position that I have, this is what I want you to do, provide for them, provide for them like I provide for you, and he gives the one simple reason that should echo in every person's heart, you have a master in heaven, so you are going to be called to account, you're going to be called to account, just as you call people to account, you yourself are going to be called to account, just as you are their master and you have them in your hands, you, Jesus has you in his hands, the way you hold them is the way he holds you, and so give as it's been given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, that's how Jesus put it, the idea is that you do everything that you can to pack in as much goodness as you can, pour it into your lap, for with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, so Jesus is your master, and how did he provide for you, how did he provide for you, what did he give you, he gave himself, gave himself, and it cost him everything he had to provide for you, and so shouldn't the cross unclench our hands and make us generous to those who are under us, because Jesus was generous towards us,

Jesus gave his all to you, his servant, his servant, the one underneath him, the one in his power, so employees, employers, who is the most important person at your work?

It's Jesus Christ, it's Jesus, and Jesus isn't going to stay at home while you go to work tomorrow, that's exciting, that has lots of potential, that has lots of motivation, but it also has lots of responsibilities, and so it's the Lord Christ you are serving, and he has loved you with everlasting love, he has saved you from everlasting destruction, he has given his life for you, he was humbled to the grave, and now he is risen and exalted over all, so tomorrow, let's serve him with all of our heart when we go to work, let's pray, oh father we thank you for your precious word that teaches us the best way to live, that teaches us our responsibilities and our duties, that gives us such wonderful motivation, lord Jesus

I pray that you would loom large in our hearts and in our minds. And that as we go to work and as we do our task that we're called to tomorrow, that we would make it all about you.

And that our hearts would even worship and adore and serve you as we go to work. I pray for the men and the women who have these regular jobs in difficult places or easy places, whatever their work is called them to do.

[37 : 34] I pray that you would help them. Help them with encouragement. Keep them from being discouraged.

Help them to shine as bright lights and help them to work hard when they're tired. To work hard when they're discouraged because they remember that they're doing it for you.

Thank you that there's not this huge section of our lives and these huge amount of hours of our lives that you're not concerned about and you don't care about and that you have nothing to say about. Thank you that you gather up everything, the whole universe and everything in it, and you make it about the Lord Jesus.

I pray that we would see our world and our lives and ourselves that way. That no one would escape the Lord Jesus. It's in his name I do pray.
Amen. Amen. Amen.