

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-THREE

Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

The way we conduct ourselves at work is our testimony. How we do our job tells others more about our relationship with Christ than how we worship on the Lord's day.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GOD is at the center of all things and the ruler of all He has made. Whatever He has built, He owns. Regarding how the world works, He sets the rules. And when mapping the course for our lives, He has the decisive say. God is our *final* authority. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul declared the all-encompassing authority of God—He is the “Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all” (Ephesians 4:6 MSG).

What is our role under God's authority? To take responsibility for whatever God assigns us. He is the master, and we're the managers. Put another way, *God is our boss*. Regardless of our job—whether we are a plumber, teacher, administrator, salesperson, social worker, stay-at-home parent, or full-time minister—we work for God.

For the Christian, there's no such thing as “sacred” and “secular” vocations. All vocations are sacred! God has called all of us to our work, and we play a significant role in God's kingdom simply by fulfilling His calling.

One way we submit to God's authority is by submitting to those whom God has placed in authority over us, such as our employers. In this study, Paul extends his theme of submission from the home to the workplace, where we'll discover how employees and employers relate to one another as they labor together under the canopy of God's rule.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

We spend a lot of our waking hours on the job under someone else’s authority or in authority over someone. As you begin this study, invite the Lord into your work relationships. In the space below, ask the Lord to bring peace if disharmony exists, resolution to conflicts, and honest communication. Also, bring your attitude before the Lord and invite Him to search your heart and guide your course.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we often read more than one version of the Bible to round out our understanding of a passage. Read *Ephesians 6:5–9* in three Bible versions, New Living Translation, New American Standard Bible, and The Message. Try reading aloud one verse at a time in each version.



Observation: Mutual Submission in the Workplace

A simple way to go from “reading” to “observing” a passage is to write what you see.¹ By recording some of the subtle differences in the versions, Scripture will come to life for you. For example, here are three phrases that express the same concept in Ephesians 6:5, but each version enhances different aspects of Paul’s thought:

- “Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ” (Ephesians 6:5 NLT).
- “Be obedient . . . as to Christ” (6:5 NASB).
- “Respectfully obey . . . with an eye to obeying the *real* master, Christ” (6:5 MSG).



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What other interesting phrases do you see in comparison?

Verse	Interesting Phrases in Comparison
6:6	
6:7	
6:8	
6:9	

Right away, we observe Paul addressing slaves, not employees—which raises the question: Was Paul endorsing slavery? No, he wasn't. We'll examine why we know Paul was not a proponent of slavery in the interpretation phase. For now, let's apply Paul's directives to employees and employers, which is a logical connection because the issue at heart in Paul's instructions wasn't slavery but attitude at the workplace.

Obedience with the Right Attitudes—Ephesians 6:5–6

The overarching command to employees is “obey” (Ephesians 6:5)—which simply means to do what our employers ask. Paul qualifies his command with six attitudes that should characterize Christian workers regardless of our employment.



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The following chart lists these attitudes. In the left column, you'll see the English translation of Paul's Greek word and, in the middle column, a cross-reference to another verse with the same word. Read the cross-references and use your resources to define and describe each attitude that drives our obedience.²

Attitude	Cross-reference	Definition
deep respect (6:5) <i>phobos</i>	<i>Ephesians 5:21</i> ("reverence")	
fear (6:5) <i>tromos</i>	<i>Philippians 2:12</i> NASB ("trembling")	
sincerely (6:5) <i>haplotas</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 11:3</i> ("pure")	
not by way of eyeservice (6:6 NASB) <i>ophthalmoudoulian</i>	<i>Colossians 3:22</i> ("not just when they are watching you")	
not . . . as people-pleasers (6:6 NASB) <i>anthropareskos</i>	<i>Colossians 3:22</i> NASB	
as slaves of Christ (6:6) <i>doulos</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 7:22</i>	



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Rewrite these concepts into a principle or principles that can guide your work ethic.

Did you catch Paul’s subtle wordplay in the Greek words for “eyeservice” (NASB) and “slaves” in 6:6—*ophthalmodoulian* and *doulos*? The first word contains the word, *doulian*, a variation of the Greek word, *doulos*. Paul is contrasting eyeservice with Christ-service. We must not work only while our boss has his or her eye on us—that’s half-hearted “eyeservice” obedience. We work wholeheartedly under the ever-watchful eye of Christ. That is Christ-service obedience—which leads to Paul’s concluding point about our true motive for working.

Obedience with the Right Motive—Ephesians 6:7–8

Christian employees don’t work for a fat paycheck, notoriety, power, security, or enviable perks. What did Paul say should be our motivation, according to *Ephesians 6:7–8*?

How might this motivation make a difference in your work attitude?



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You work for Christ. He doesn't sign your paycheck, but He is the one for whom you are responsible. He is watching you when no one else watches. He sets the standard no one else sets. That's why you work as hard as you do. That's why you don't overlook the little things. You serve the Lord Christ as master of your life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Strong Words to Masters

By instructing slaves to obey their masters, was Paul condoning slavery? Why didn't he condemn the contemptable institution? According to commentator John MacArthur, Paul's mission wasn't to reform society but to reform hearts.

New Testament teaching does not focus on reforming and restructuring human systems, which are never the root cause of human problems. The issue is always the heart—which, when wicked, will corrupt the best of systems and, when righteous, will improve the worst. If men's hearts were not changed, they will find ways to oppress others regardless of whether or not there is actual slavery.³

Why do you think Paul focused more on transforming hearts than society?

According to *1 Corinthians 7:21–23*, what was Paul's advice to slaves and, by implication, his view on slavery?



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Although Paul didn't tell masters to free their slaves, his words were nonetheless liberating. Read *Ephesians 6:9* as you imagine a slave owner in the first century might read it.⁴ Compare Paul's words with *Galatians 3:28*. What was Paul's revolutionary message to Christian masters that would transform their hearts and their perspective toward those society deemed underclass?

What principle can you draw for today's employers?

Employers, keep your promises, pay fair wages, have a heart, give affirmation and encouragement to someone every day. Provide a safe and wholesome environment for workers. Guard against prejudice and preferential treatment. Maintain confidentiality. Show compassion. Who wouldn't want to work for a boss like that!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Rewards from the Master

Christ is the best boss to serve and offers the richest benefits package! He hands out the truest and most lasting rewards, and no good work goes unnoticed. What do the following verses add to Paul's encouragement that "the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do" (Ephesians 6:8)?

Galatians 6:4–5

Colossians 3:17, 23

Hebrews 6:10



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Christ's reward is not the kind of commission we're used to. It's not in dollars and cents. It's in eternal rewards that will come. He sees the work we do that's done for the right reasons and for His glory without praise from people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Honoring God in Your Occupation

As an employee, what does it mean for you to work for Christ and serve others in your occupation? Today, at your workplace, how can you personally live out Paul's command to "serve . . . as you would serve Christ" (Ephesians 6:5)?

Does your effort and productivity diminish when the boss isn't looking? Do you sometimes slip into an "eye-service" rather than a "Christ-service" work ethic? Next time you clock in, imagine Christ clocking in with you. What would it be like to work under His watchful and encouraging eye, knowing He will reward the good you do?



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If you're the employer, how can you do the same—serve as you would serve Christ and work under His watchful eye as you lead your employees?

The world doesn't see us worshipping in the sanctuary or learning in Bible studies. Most people know us only by our work. Let's "work heartily, as for the Lord" (Colossians 3:23 NASB), so He gets the glory and we get the satisfaction of serving the world's best Boss!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I often do my job and nobody notices . . . until I mess up. It can be discouraging at times. Thank You that You notice and You will reward me in ways I can't imagine. I love working for You, the One who has called me to do a job that only I can do. Fill my heart with joy knowing my labor is never in vain when I do it for You. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. A good concordance, such as *The Strongest NASB Concordance*, lists Greek root words along with cross-references to other verses to help you define a particular word. An online source for defining Greek words is [NetBible.org](#). After finding the passage, click on the "Greek" tab and then hover over the word in the English text to highlight the corresponding Greek word. Double-click on the Greek word to see the definition and do a word study. Give it a try!
3. John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 324.
4. For more information on first-century slavery practices, read "Slavery in Paul's Day," Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 294.

