

## EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

### Message #19

### Ephesians 6:5-9

I am going to begin tonight's exposition with a statement that was made by Walter Liefeld that probably will not go over too well with some. But the statement is accurate and true to the Word of God. "Disrespect for parents, employers, spouses and a government official is not appropriate for a Christian." You may think it is your right to be disrespectful, but there will come a day when we will stand before God and the last thing any of us will be thinking is about what we had the right to do on earth.

What we have been learning as we journey through Ephesians is that the grace of God that has saved us is a grace that God wants us to demonstrate in a variety of contexts of relationships. We have already seen that God's grace is to be seen in that wives are to submit to a husband, a husband is to love his wife, children are to obey and honor their parents and fathers are to nurture their children and not anger their children.

I know that many of you here tonight worked hard for many years and now you are retired. You won't have to get up early tomorrow and go back to the grind that you did for so many years. But for some of us, we have to go back to work next week and there are times when that is not a very happy proposition.

When Paul wrote Ephesians, many of the Christians who went to church were slaves. In fact, it has been calculated that there were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. The early church was not comprised mostly of professional and white collar workers. There were not many scholars, lawyers, doctors or business entrepreneurs who made up the early church.

The vast majority were slaves. They would go to church on Sunday and then they had to go back to their master after church. They went to a service on Sunday where they were treated as an equal in the family of God, but then on Monday they were a slave, doing slave labor.

In the Roman Empire the ethics of slavery were never questioned. Paul did not challenge these slaves to form a protest movement. He did not challenge them to run away from responsibility. What Paul did is he challenged them to reflect the transforming power of the grace of God on their jobs. What Paul writes is this:

**GRACE AGE BELIEVERS ARE TO DEMONSTRATE GOD'S GRACE BY HOW THEY WORK AND BY THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHERS IN THEIR WORK.**

One of the best ways we can stand out as a grace reflector is by the way we work and our attitudes toward others with whom or for whom we work.

Now before we look at the instruction, we need to realize that this instruction is written to believers in the church. In fact, the nouns "slaves" (v. 5) and "masters" (v. 9) are both articular "the slaves" (οἱ δούλοι) "the masters" (οἱ κυριοί). This instruction is not addressed to a government, a corporation, or the lost world.

This instruction is given to Grace Age believers in a church. God wants His people demonstrating they are Grace Age believers in their work situations and in this text he explains how to do that. There are two Grace Age reflecting areas that are spelled out here:

**GRACE AGE REFLECTOR #1** – Servants are to demonstrate God's grace by their response and attitudes toward their masters, and by their diligent work on their jobs. **6:5-8**

Back at this time, slaves were the employees of society. In fact, in many of these cities, "slaves outnumbered freemen." A typical slave made a living by working for some master who had authority over him. Usually slaves were forced to be slaves and were typically purchased from a slave pool of those who had been captured in war. If you were born into a slave family, you were a slave. One could be made a slave by punishment for a crime and some parents sold their children to be a slave. Now sometimes a slave would work for a good master who would take good care of him and in that case there were free slaves who chose to be a slave because he worked for a good master. If a slave were faithful, he could be set free.

I recently heard an interview with a nice man who worked for Whitney Houston. He said she treated him well and he worked for her for years. In all reality, Whitney was the master and he was the servant and he willingly chose to be the servant because he was cared for. It worked the same way in the first century.

Now there are two main points Paul develops here:

**Point #1** - Slaves are to be obedient to their masters. **6:5-7**

We could say this a little different way; Grace Age employees are to be obedient to their Grace Age employers. That word "obedient" (ὕπακουετε) is the same word used in verse 1. It is a word that means to continually give careful attention to what the master says and submit yourself to it in obedience (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 457).

Now Paul qualifies this obedience in four ways and may we say that in order for a slave to actually operate like this, it would be an amazing demonstration of the grace of God. Most slaves were angry and resentful so one who manifested these qualifications would truly stand out:

**Obedience Qualification #1** - This obedience is to masters according to the flesh. **6:5a**

In fleshly, physical areas there is to be obedience, not when it comes to spiritual obedience. In other words, the Word of God is to be obeyed spiritually, but masters are to be obeyed when it comes to physical work. Furthermore, this sets the parameters of the obedience; it is only for a temporal period of time. Once this flesh life is over, everything will change and there will be eternal equality and no partiality of a slave or a master.

**Obedience Qualification #2** - This obedience is to be with fear and trembling. **6:5b**

We are to have a reverent and respectful attitude toward those in authority over us on the job.

We are not to despise management, we are to respect it and even in a right sense reverence it. Think about it for a moment. Some company gives you an opportunity to work for it. Someone who runs a company decides to share what it has with you. There ought to be a respectful attitude we should have. Our obedience should be with fear and trembling.

**Obedience Qualification #3** - This obedience is to be with a sincere heart as to Christ. **6:5c**

That word “sincerity” (απλοτης) is one that refers to a heart that is gracious, liberal, sincere, honorable (*Ibid.*, p. 47). God wants us to be honorable in our work from our hearts. We are not to be hypocritical, but we are to be gracious to our masters and liberal in our service. In fact, we are to be as sincere about our responsibility to work as we are in our responsibility to Jesus Christ. God wants us viewing our work as service for Jesus Christ.

That is so foreign to the way most people think. For most people the idea is that work is a means to an end. Work equals wealth, pleasure and leisure. God says, view your work as service for Jesus Christ. Do your work with a sincere heart that views it that way.

**Obedience Qualification #4** - This obedience is not to be for just eye service. **6:6**

God does not want his people working for eye service, but out of a heart service. God does not want us to be the kind of employee who only works hard when people are watching us. He wants us doing our best out of our hearts.

There are some people who have no sense of loyalty or responsibility to their work. They want a paycheck and if someone in management happens to be around, they will give the impression they really care and work hard, but in all reality they just are doing it to put on a show. God does not want us eye pleasers or men pleasers, He wants us God pleasers.

God wanted those first century slaves to do their work as slaves of Christ, not as slaves of a master. Slaves of Christ think operate in two ways on the job that please God, that are foreign to most people:

**(God Pleasing Way #1)** - God pleasers on the job desire to do the will of God from their inner most being. **6:6a**

The word “heart” is the word “soul” (ψυχης). The slave or employee who truly reflects God’s grace is one who from his heart and soul does his best job not just to please men, but because this is the will of God.

**(God Pleasing Way #2)** - God pleasers on the job work for the Lord and not for men. **6:7**

Notice that those who please God do good work and render good service on the job. They do this for God. The idea here is that the slave promotes the good will of the master by his work by continually realizing that he is doing this work for the Lord.

The servant of God will not try to get by on the job doing as little as possible; he will do as much as he can, rendering good service for the Lord.

**Point #2** - The reason why slaves are to be obedient to their masters. **6:8**

Now you and I live in a time of great blessing. Typically we go to work for a company and figure if we are faithful and loyal and hardworking we will advance. We will achieve things, we will be promoted, we will receive raises and remuneration and we will be rewarded.

In the first century, slaves had little hope that if you work hard for your master, he will promote you and give you good raises. There were a few who did, but they were far and few between.

So God says I want my servants to know that if you do a good job, “whatever” good thing you do for Me, I will pay you back. Think about that. Whatever good thing you do for God on your job, even if you don’t remember it, will be rewarded by God.

Often times some of the remuneration comes during this life time. But you can count on the fact that if you did work hard and did good things on the job to reflect God’s grace, you can know that God keeps the records and God will reward you.

**GRACE AGE REFLECTOR #2** – Masters are to demonstrate God’s grace by proper attitudes and proper treatment of their servants. **6:9**

Now those believers who are in a master or management role do not get off the hook from responsibility to their employees if they want to please God. Notice how **verse 9** begins, “master do the same things to them.” Again we point out that this is addressed to a believing master. Masters are responsible to serve God with their management responsibilities, realizing that God has given them their position and their people.

Masters are to be fair and gracious and kind to their servants and they are to treat them respectfully and with integrity. Those who are over others need to know that they too will have a payday in which God will pay them back for what they did or did not do for their employees.

The specific charge to the master was “don’t threaten” your people. During this time, masters could be tyrants to their slaves and they could abuse them. They had total authority over those who worked for them. They could beat them or even kill them.

Paul never wanted Grace Age masters operating on the same abusive level with the unsaved world. Both servants and masters were to govern themselves in ways that reflected the grace of God.

Now Paul says that leaders need to keep in mind that God is the master over all people—employers and employees. Position and status on earth means nothing in heaven. Those who are in management are warned against wrongdoing because there is a heavenly master who keeps track of everything and in eternity the playing field will be evened.

No matter what our position was on earth, the fact is, there will be no partiality at God’s judgment. Wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants and masters will all face God to determine how we reflected God’s grace in various relationship contexts.