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#4

Living in Light & Love:

God's design for employees and employers

Ephesians 6:5-9

Good morning, welcome to Harvest Community Church, Litchfield. "May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:2) We are very glad that you are here, thank you for coming this morning!

Let's pray:

Introduction:

I want to begin this morning in the book of **Deuteronomy, in Chapter 4:1** which says, **"And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you."**

This says to me that God's desire is that his people "may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, ...is giving you." I could say this in a different way: "God's desire for his people is that they not only experience his very best for their lives, but that they do what is best and that their joy in Him will increase as a result." This is the purpose behind God's teaching, his statutes, his rules - that his people joyfully share in his glorious, perfect and joy filled purpose for them - that they may "live and go in and take possession of" God's promises.

This reality remains true all the way forward into the New Testament, where the apostle Paul writes in **Ephesians 6:5-9 (ESV)** 5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

God's perfect design for employees and employers remains true today, as it did in Deuteronomy and in Paul's day. God's statutes, his teaching, his rules, relating to employment and daily business relationships are for the purpose of his people experiencing his very best and displaying God's very best to others! His glory is not only our joy, but our responsibility to display to the world. This is what it means to "live" for God!

In Paul's world, there were generally three categories or strata's of society - Slaves, Slave Masters, and Soldiers. Ephesians 6:5-9 addresses two of those categories - Slaves (Bond-servants) and Slave Masters (Masters).

The English Standard Version of the Bible chooses to translate the Greek word "doulos" as "bondservant" in our passage. This is explained in the "preface" to the ESV, which says, "...a particular difficulty is presented when words in biblical Hebrew and Greek refer to ancient practices and institutions

that do not correspond directly to those in the modern world. Such is the case in the translation of ‘ebed (Hebrew) and doulos (Greek), terms which are often rendered “slave.” These terms, however, actually cover a range of relationships that requires a range of renderings—“slave,” “bondservant,” or “servant”—depending on the context. Further, the word “slave” currently carries associations with the often brutal and dehumanizing institution of slavery particularly in nineteenth-century America. For this reason, the ESV translation of the words ‘ebed and doulos has been undertaken with particular attention to their meaning in each specific context. Thus in Old Testament times, one might enter slavery either voluntarily (e.g., to escape poverty or to pay off a debt) or involuntarily (e.g., by birth, by being captured in battle, or by judicial sentence). Protection for all in servitude in ancient Israel was provided by the Mosaic Law, including specific provisions for release from slavery. In New Testament times, a doulos is often best described as a “bondservant”—that is, someone in the Roman Empire officially bound under contract to serve his master for seven years (except for those in Caesar’s household in Rome who were contracted for fourteen years). When the contract expired, the person was freed, given his wage that had been saved by the master, and officially declared a freedman. The ESV usage thus seeks to express the most fitting nuance of meaning in each context. Where absolute ownership by a master is envisaged (as in Romans 6), “slave” is used; where a more limited form of servitude is in view, “bondservant” is used (as in 1 Corinthians 7:21–24); where the context indicates a wide range of freedom (as in John 4:51), “servant” is preferred.”

How is the Twenty-first century reader to understand what God intended (through Paul) to say to the church? If the translators are correct, like wives and children in Eph 5:21-6:4, “Bond-servants” are also members of God’s family and have the same responsibility toward “submission” to one another. **Ephesians 5:21** (ESV) “...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This responsibility is placed on the “Master” as well. Nothing has changed for each member of the family of God, even today, we are to please the Lord, do his will and be submissive. (Eph 5:10,17,21)

The function of “Bond-servants (slaves) in this passages connects to us today in the “Employee / Employer” relationship. This is framed within a Christian ethic and relationship.

So let’s look at what God expects of a “good Christian employee” (Bond-servant - Slave)

Ephesians 6:5-8 (ESV)

1. **Bondservants, [Employees]**

A. What kind of work attitude is expected

v. 5 **obey** your earthly masters

- 1) With Christ magnifying **respect** (attitude)- “...with fear and trembling,”
- 2) With Christ magnifying **sincerity** (motivation)- “...with a sincere heart,
- 3) With Christ centered **duty** -(responsibility)-“...**as you would Christ,**”

v. 6 **Attitudes/Actions to avoid**

- 4) Avoid, stay away from people pleasing “...not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers,

v. 6 **Be accountable** to Christ first

- 5) (“Work”) as but **as bondservants of Christ,**

v. 7 **rendering service with a good will** [The work effort expectation of a Christian employee]

- 6) as to the Lord and not to man,

v. 8 **knowing** that God rewards Christ magnifying obedience

- 7) whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

2. Masters [Employers]

v. 9 Masters, **do the same to them**

1. Seek Christ magnifying actions/attitudes - "...stop your threatening,"
2. Seek a Christ magnifying understanding - "...knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven,"
3. Remember, you are accountable to Christ - "...and that there is no partiality with him."

The goal for all bond-servants and masters (employees and employers) is rendering their work, service, actions and attitude as if they were being done for and in obedience to Christ. Our work attitudes and actions point directly to the Lord Jesus, when we joyfully obey Jesus is exalted and our joy in his joy over us increases!

6 Key attitudes for the Christian employee/employer

1. Obedience
2. Reverence
3. Sincerity
4. Christ centered ethics
5. Fear Free Environment
6. Leading through service

Scriptures for further study and application:

Colossians 3:22-24 (ESV) 22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

1 Timothy 6:1 (ESV) Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.

1 Peter 2:18-21 (ESV) 18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

1 Peter 3:13-17 (ESV) 13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (ESV) 22 And he put all things under his (Jesus) feet and gave him (Jesus) as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 5:21 (ESV) 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.