

## *What's an Employer to Do? • Ephesians 6:9*

Slavery is out and freedom is in!

Gone are the days when the master held life and death control over the slave. No longer can one person determine another's health, happiness, economics, duties or destiny. Slavery is dead and freedom lives.

But does it? Legally that is the case, but in practicality is that really the way things are? The modern boss has amazing control over his employee's economics because he sets the wages. The contemporary employer can use the leverage of wages, working conditions and possible promotions to control hours, determine living location and set the whole direction of an employee's life. Threats of demotion or firing are frequently used by employers to gain personal services, sexual favors and financial profits. Today's manager can control the health, happiness, marriage, career, education, living standard and general well being of most employees.

Because employers exercise such massive influence and control over employees, God is very concerned that every Christian employer knows what he is to do! So, whether you are the head of a huge corporation with thousands of workers, a low-level manager with a few subordinates or a parent who hires an occasional babysitter, this study is for you.

Christian employers, God expects the best in your relationships to your employees.

Three expectations from God appear in Ephesians 6:4. The first expectation is that Christian employers must always treat their employees well. "Masters, treat your slaves in the same way" tells employers to give the same kind of right treatment to employees as employees are supposed to give to employers.

In order to know exactly what that includes, we must backtrack. Ephesians 6:5-8 says,

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.

Just as employees should obey the boss as if obeying Jesus Christ, employers should treat employees as they would treat Jesus Christ. Jesus was an employee prior to his public ministry. He was probably a carpenter in Nazareth. Some unnamed employer once had Jesus Christ on his payroll. I wonder how he treated him.

Suppose Jesus was working for you. What difference would that make in your wages, working conditions, attitude and behavior? Think of some of the people who work for you. God expects your relationship to them to be "as to Christ", "do the same to them"!

Employers are to seek the will of God for their employees. That is more important than profit or

project. The Christian employer is always praying for an understanding of God's will for those responsible to him. You make your decisions and issue your orders on this basis. Sometimes it will be hard because sometimes God's will may mean reprimand or discharge. Employer, check your heart's attitude. Are you seeking God's will for your employees?

Ephesians 6:7 tells us, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men."

Some bosses are grumps! They are regular Scrooges in their attitudes toward employees. They are overly demanding, unfair in expecta-

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tions, impossible to please, heavy on criticism, short on praise.

Christian bosses must be different, always evidencing a positive attitude, encouragement and good will toward subordinates. Everyone in the company knows who the Christian bosses are because they look to the Lord for their positive attitude toward their workers. They are doing their job out of service to Jesus Christ.

Christian boss, check out your attitude. Have you shown that kind of good will to your people, as to the Lord?

There is a tricky implication in verse 8 when it says, "because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free." The employee is to trust God and not his boss for adequate remuneration. The employer is to trust God and not his employees for a fair profit!

Do you get the picture? Employers are to treat their employees fairly and justly and then depend on God to provide the remuneration --- the employer is not to gain a profit at the expense of right treatment of workers!

Colossians 4:1 is a parallel passage where we are told, "Masters (or employers!), provide your slaves (or employees!) with what is right and fair."

Determination of justice and fairness is by God's measure and not the laws of the land. Ancient slave owners could legally abuse and take advantage of their slaves. But that didn't make it right with God. Modern employers may be able to legally underpay and overwork their employees, but it's still wrong before God.

God offers you a deal: you take proper care of your employees and God will take proper care of you!

What about it? How have you been treating your employees? What are the areas where you need to change? This week determine to start making wrongs right. Give the long overdue raise. Offer the word of encouragement. Change your attitude. Extend that difficult word of apology. Promise yourself and God that, starting now, you will treat your employees in the right

way.

Expectation number two is simply and clearly stated in the middle of verse 9 where it says, "Do not threaten them." I never cease to be amazed at the way God's Word has an uncanny ability to zero-in on our areas of greatest need. It seems that employers have a natural bent to try to motivate employees by threat. God is here saying that we are not to do that.

Long before modern management science was developed, God's Word taught that positive motivation is far more effective than negative motivation. Encourage, strengthen, uplift, teach your employees. Do all those things that we have reviewed in verses 5 through 8 to positively motivate.

I've worked for bosses who motivate by encouragement, and I've worked for bosses who motivate by threats. Without doubt, I have done my best work for those bosses who positively motivate.

This is not to say that an employee cannot be reprimanded or fired. Sometimes that is necessary. Sometimes that is the most loving thing to do. Sometimes that is God's will and you must carry it out. Nevertheless, avoid negative methods of motivation.

Look at how God treats us! God forgives our sins. He tells us that we are guaranteed heaven and are no longer under condemnation. God does not motivate the Christian to faithfulness through threat or guilt.

Employers, avoid the common threats: "If you do that one more time, you're through!" "You produce the way I tell you or I'll find someone else!" "Work hard and you'll get along fine with me; cross me and I'll see to it that you never get another job in this industry!" "Do it right this time or I'll make an example out of you in front of the whole office!"

The third expectation is to remember God's impartiality. God reckons us all to be servants. We don't think of ourselves that way. But God sees both employers and employees as his servants. Employers are accountable to God as servants and not as masters. Never forget that it

is only because of God's choice that you are the employer and someone else is the employee. God may change that!

Suppose that God were to turn the tables and reverse the present order of things so that those who now work for you became your bosses and treated you exactly as you now treat them.

With the tables turned, how would you rate your salary, your working conditions, your responsibilities, your treatment?

The Golden Rule for Employers might say: "Do unto employees as you would have them do unto you if you were their employee!" Better yet, "Do unto your employees as God has done unto you!"

Remember God judges on the basis of right and not on the basis of rank. Someday at the Judgment Seat of Christ when all of our Christian lives will be evaluated, God's question will be "What was done?" and not "Who did it?" There will be no titles of President, Manager, Department Head, Owner, Boss, Captain, Crew Chief, Officers or Master before the Judgment Seat of Christ. We all will be on level ground being rewarded not for the rank we held but for the right we did!

"...there is no favoritism with him."

The key verse to this whole section is Ephesians 5:21, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. That subjection extends to all the primary relationships of life. Wives, be subject to your husbands. Husbands, be subject to your wives. Children, be subject to your parents. Parents, be subject to your children. Employees, slaves, be subject to your employer, to your master. Masters, be subject to your slaves.

Now wait a minute. You know the order of things in ancient days. You know how slavery works. How on earth could a master ever be subject to a slave? How can an employer ever be subject to an employee?

Let me tell you a true story that happened long ago in an ancient country on the Eastern

shore of the Mediterranean Sea. There lived the greatest man in all of history. He was richer than all the kingdoms of the world combined, wiser than all the other sages who lived, more knowledgeable than all the facts in every library, stronger than all the armies that have ever marched. He was a king, a lord, a master.

In fact, his people called him Master and pledged themselves to obey his every whim. They hung on his every word. They literally worshiped him!

One Thursday night, the Master condescended to eat an important holiday meal with his servants. Near the end of the meal he did something which broke every rule of etiquette, every tradition of the culture and every expectation of the properly ordered master/servant relationship. He stood up, took off his clothes, wrapped a towel around his waist and, one by one, washed each of his servant's feet. He even washed the feet of the servant whom he knew would betray him the same night.

His name was Jesus Christ. King of kings. Lord of lords. Master of masters. It is he who set the example of the kind of boss that we are to be. It is he who says, "Christian employer, I expect the very best of you in your relationship to your employees."

What is your response? What will you do? What will be different this week at work, at school, at home, as you follow in the footsteps of the Master who was subject to his servants?

***"Do unto employees as you would have them do unto you if you were their employee!"***

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