

Congregational handout; outline sermon text on following pages

Ephesians 6:5-9 — A Winning Walk at Work

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A. Introduction

1. Work forms an important part of most people's lives
 - a. this is true whether employed outside or inside the home
 - b. we spend our formative years in preparing for life's work
 - (A) the prime years of our lives engaged in it
 - (B) and the declining years reminiscing about it
 - c. work forms a major part of our social activity and many of our friends are our fellow workers
 - d. work rewards us both financially and in satisfaction gained
 - e. it isn't surprising, then, that our conversation turns to our job and what we are doing at work

2. jobs and our work place can be a source of much humour
 - a. for example, this was overheard at the water cooler: 'The boss said that I would get a raise when I earned it. He's crazy if he thinks I'm gonna wait that long.'—{2}.
 - b. and one job applicant when told they couldn't hire him as there wasn't enough work to keep him busy, replied that they would be surprised how little work that would take
 - c. some of the favourite phrases in those glowing job descriptions have been translated as follows:
 - (A) "Competitive Salary" – We remain competitive by paying less than our competitors
 - (B) "Join Our Fast Paced Company" – We have no time to train you
 - (C) "Must be Deadline Oriented" – You will be six months behind schedule on your first day
 - (D) "Some Overtime Required" – Some time each night; some time each weekend
 - (E) "Duties will Vary" – Anyone in the office can boss you around
 - (F) "Seeking Candidates with a Wide Variety of Experience" – You are replacing three people who just left
 - (G) "Problem Solving Skills a Must" – We are in a perpetual chaos; your first task is to find out what is going on. —{3}.

3. God, in the Bible, puts work on a higher plane
 - a. it was an integral part of the Sabbath command given by God to Israel as they came out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery – ‘Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:’ (Exodus 20:9 AV)
 - b. it is a vocation; it is a calling; it is an appointment by God
 - c. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. ²² For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave. – (1 Corinthians 7:21-22)
 - d. this view of work underlies our passage today dealing with slaves and masters; or, in terms of a more up to date application, with employees and employers
 - e. but, let us first of all build a background to these verses, looking at ...

B. Slavery in Bible Times

1. in the Old Testament

- a. prisoners taken in battle were sometimes enslaved
- b. sometimes debt forced people into slavery
- c. but the laws given of God by Moses for living in Canaan gave certain rights to such slaves
- d. one of these was that after 7 years they should be freed, so that there should not be slavery in perpetuity
- e. but Jeremiah tells how they had failed to keep these laws
- f. after the return from exile under the rule of the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, such laws were often ignored

2. in the New Testament times

- a. there were about 60 million slaves, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the population
- b. the Roman laws were austere, permitting the master to exact brutal punishment, even death, on the slave
- c. yet for the most part, if only in self-interest, masters cared for their servants’ well being, as is seen in the story of the centurion who exhibiting a marvellous faith, sought Jesus on behalf of his sick servant (Luke 7:1-10)
- d. slaves filled many roles in society: teachers, stewards, and administrators, often accorded the status of

- their masters
 - e. slaves were the economic backbone of the empire
 - f. prisoners of war and debtors provided many slaves, but some voluntarily sold themselves to gain Roman citizenship
 - g. yet slaves could look forward to becoming freedmen, by paying off their debt or by the graciousness of their master
 - h. Tenney Frank estimates that ½ million slaves were freed in the period from 81-49 BC. 'The Roman slave, far from living in perpetual servitude, could look forward to a day of opportunity. It became common practice of the Romans to free their slaves and then establish them in a trade of profession. Many times the former slave became wealthier than his patron.' ^{4}.
3. how does the Bible deal with slavery?
- a. it does not incite slaves to rise up in rebellion against their owners, nor order owners to release their slaves
 - b. but in 1 Timothy 1:8-11, 'kidnapping' (AV,), or literally, 'slave-trading,' is listed as an unacceptable activity for the Christian
 - c. Paul hints that Philemon (verse 16) now free Onesimus
 - d. the Gospel message which frees us from sin undermined the very root causes of slavery
 - e. Jean Calvin attributed slavery to original sin. He deduced it to be 'a thing totally against all the order of nature' that human beings 'fashioned after the image of God' should ever be 'put to such reproach' ^{5}.
 - f. Wilberforce and others fought for the abolition of slavery in Britain in 1807 and the Empire, 1833
 - g. Christians are still championing this cause
4. in summary, in Paul's time
- a. the slave-master relationship somewhat resembled today's employee-employer relationship
 - b. that is how we will apply these verses to ourselves today

C. For Slaves or Employees

1. The Duty ...

a. This duty ... is Obedience

- (A) ^{5a} Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters ...
- (B) note that this is unqualified as to the moral worth of the masters, whether good or evil
- (C) in that sense, it follows the words of our Lord: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," (Matthew 5:44)
- (D) and of Peter, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable." (1 Peter 2:18)
- (E) so obedience is the duty, a part of the larger principle given in Romans 13:1-7 of submitting and giving honour due to constituted authority.

b. This duty ... is Temporal

- (A) ^{5b} ... according to the flesh
- (B) this reminder will help when one is serving 'those who are unreasonable' – this service
 - (1) is only on this earth
 - (2) is only temporary
- (C) and it but forms part of what is a higher service, that to our heavenly Lord and Master
- (D) hence the way or manner of our obedience is given

2. The Manner ...

a. This manner ... is Zealous

- (A) ^{5c} ... with fear and trembling, ...
- (B) these words do not mean a cowering, abject servility
- (C) these words described Paul as he preached the gospel to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:3)
- (D) they described how the Corinthian church in loving obedience received Titus (2 Corinthians 7:15)
- (E) and they describe how we are to work out our obeying to work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12)
- (F) it is being zealous to do one's duty fully and faithfully

b. This manner ... is Honest

- (A) ^{5d} ... in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ...
- (B) that word 'sincerity' or 'singleness' is literally 'without folds' conveying the idea of 'being without

pretence'

- (C) an example of something with folds, would be if you were to go into a store to buy a garment or a bolt of cloth, and then discover it had been folded in such a way as to hide a flaw or blemish
 - (D) or, maybe more timely, folding over the table-cloth at the Christmas dinner to hide something spilled upon it
 - (E) such duplicity is not to be found in a Christian's work
- c. This manner ... is Consistent
- (A) ^{6a} not by way of eyeservice, ...
 - (B) Jack was sitting at the desk gazing out the window when his boss walked in and thundered, 'Why aren't you working?' Without thinking Jack answered, "Cause I didn't see you coming!" —^{6}.
 - (C) we have all known the Jack's of the world; those who are industrious when the manager's eye is on them and who slack off when it isn't
 - (D) such eyeservice is not for the Christian, who are to work consistently, whether watched or not
- d. This manner ... is Christ-Directed
- (A) ^{6b} ... not ... as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, ...
 - (B) man's applause is pleasant but fickle; the hosanna's of today quickly turn to the 'crucify him'
 - (C) Christians are to look beyond their earthly employer to the Christ who directs their life for His commendation
- e. This manner ... is Godward
- (A) ^{6c} ... doing the will of God from the heart. ...
 - (B) it's easy to compartmentalize our lives into the secular and the religious, as being distinct and separated
 - (C) but God's word doesn't view it in that fashion, telling us 'Whatever you hand finds to do, do it with all you might ...' (Ecclesiastes 9:10) and '... whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31)
 - (D) Dorothy says wrote 'Work is not, primarily, something one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. When a man or a woman is called to a particular job of secular work, that is as true a vocation as though he or she were called to specifically religious work.' —^{7}.
 - (E) thus, we should view our work as much a part of our worship as when we gather to sing hymns
- f. This manner ... is Well Disposed

- (A) ^{7a} With good will render service, ...
- (B) this is service that wishes the recipient well
- (C) this is service with a whole-hearted attitude
- (D) Christians should work with an eagerness that 'does not wait to be compelled'—{8}.

3. The Incentive ...

a. This is done ... for God's Sake

- (A) ^{7b} ... as to the Lord, and not to men,
- (B) because it is God whom we are really serving, not men
- (C) 'Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,' (Colossians 3:23)
- (D) and God, as our Lord, our Master, as well as Father, is honoured by that which we do for him
- (E) yet, it that not be sufficient incentive, do it ...

b. This is done ... for the Reward's Sake

- (A) ^{8a} knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, ...
- (B) or, as in Colossians 3:24, "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."
- (C) this an application of the fact that judgement is coming – 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.' (2 Corinthians 5:10) and of God "⁶ who 'will render to each person according to his deeds: '⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life;' (Romans 2:6-7)
- (D) part of the justice of God is that the wrongs suffered here on earth for His sake will one day be made right

c. This is done ... for Dignity's Sake

- (A) ^{8b} ... whether slave or free.
- (B) with these words Paul lifts what he is saying beyond the legal duty of a slave to a master to the level of what we can become through the grace of God
- (C) whatever our earthly situation, our aim when we finish our course, is to be able to look ourselves in the eye and to say, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;' (2 Timothy 4:7)

D. For Masters or Employers – the message is briefer but just as strong

1. The Duty

- a. ^{9a} And masters, do the same things to them, ...
- b. here is an application of the Golden Rule, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12 AV) – treat them as you would be treated
- c. show the same zeal, honesty, consistency and good will to those working for you that you desire from them

2. The Manner

- a. ^{9b} ... and give up threatening, ...
- b. only one item, in terms of the way the duty is carried out
- c. but it is the one that most characterizes the wrong use of power and authority
- d. and that which has most frequently marked the abuse of slaves by their masters – the harshness of treatment which degrades the servant in the absence of physical punishment – and is usually the prelude to such cruelty
- e. forego, says Paul, what may be your legal rights for the sake of your servant; because ...

3. The Incentive

- a. ^{9c} ... knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.
- b. because, as the slave, so the master – he, too, must answer to the heavenly master; he, too, faces the judgement
- c. and God shows no favouritism based on social position

E. Conclusion

1. Paul's words to slaves and masters were radical for their day
 - a. they undermined the institution of slavery even though it has returned periodically from place to place
 - b. and, they are radical for today as well
 - c. for they replace a confrontational attitude with one of mutual respect and care

2. following these ways will give a winning walk at work
 - a. not necessarily in terms of position, salary, or such-like
 - b. but winning as a testimony to Jesus Christ as our Saviour

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. Readers' Digest, February 1992, pages 59
3. From 'Walking Wisely: Christ-Centred Career' by Rev. Chris Vogel – Kerux sermons #7158
4. Quoted in 'Ephesians, God's New Society' by John R. W. Stott, page 256
5. "Ephesians, God's New Society" by John R. W. Stott, page 257

6. Adapted from The Saturday Evening Post, Jan/Feb 1994, page 32 – Kerux illustration #18378
7. From 'Creed or Chaos' by Dorothy L. Sayers – Kerux illustrations #1561
8. Robertson in Expositor's Bible Commentary, *in loc*