**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**Displaying Christ at Work**

**Ephesians 6:5-9**

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We are continuing our series in Ephesians, Brought to Life; Brought Together. We are in Ephesians 6:5-9, looking at the last relationship Paul addresses, calling slaves to submit to their masters. Today’s message is Displaying Christ at Work. In 6:5-9 Paul instructs both slaves and masters to display Christ in their relationship. Slaves reflect Christ by gladly submitting to their masters and masters display Christ by treating slaves as they would want to be treated.

Big Idea: We reflect Christ at work with the right attitude and work ethic.

**Background to Slavery in New Testament**

Let’s start with some background to slavery. Slavery has existed as long as sin has. Slavery in the Roman world is unlike slavery in American history. People were enslaved by war, trade, birth, and the poor even sold themselves into slavery for a better life. The empire was built on slavery; it was built into the fabric of society. Estimates vary, but somewhere between one third to one fifth of the Roman empire were slaves. But you would not necessarily recognize a slave on the street. They were household servants, laborers, and tradesmen as well as teachers and doctors and lawyers. They could be better educated and more skilled than their masters and run their master’s household and business. Slaves could save money, own their own slaves, and even buy their freedom. Some slaves were treated as family but others were abused. The slavery described in the New Testament is most similar to someone in the armed forces but also applies to employee employer relationship and this is how we are going to look at it today.

**How Employees Display Christ (6:5-8).**

First, Paul wants to be clear, for both employee and employers, life is a shadow or reflection of our relationship to Christ. He does this by making four references to Christ. First, slaves are to obey their masters as they would obey Christ (5); second, slaves work reflects their service to Christ (6); then, slaves are to gladly serve their masters as they would serve the Lord (7); and finally, slaves are promised that by serving their masters well, they will be rewarded by the Lord who is impartial (8-9). His point is that our lives display or reflect our relationship with Christ (1 Tim 6:1-2). Our lives are a shadow of our union with Christ and dependence upon Christ so that we stand out as lights in a dark world (Mat 5:14-16). Employees display Christ four ways: by being respectful, by working hard, by working gladly, and by working expectantly. Then he applies these same characteristics to employers.

First, employees display Christ by respecting their employers. Look at verse five, slaves obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling (5). He is telling slaves to respect their masters as God given authorities in their life just like wives are to respect their husbands and children are to honor their parents. But he adds trembling here so I think he is saying, obey your masters as the one with authority over you who can make your life pleasant or miserable depending on how you serve them. Whether you have your dream job or not; whether you have the best employer or not, respect your employer as you would Christ (1 Pet 2:18-20).

Secondly, employees display Christ by working wholeheartedly (5-6). We see this in the way Paul tells slaves to respect masters, obey your masters with fear and trembling, that is, with a sincere heart as you would Christ. You respect our employer by working sincerely or wholeheartedly as you would obey Christ (5). He wants to press home the point so he clarifies his point. You respect your employer by working whole heartedly, not only when your boss is watching but as bondservants of Christ. He knows the temptation to be lazy, only work hard when others are watching. Employees are to serve employers as they would serve Christ.

Next, employees display Christ by gladly working (6-7). Instead of working hard only when others are watching, we are to gladly work, doing God’s will from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man. Gladly working is God’s will because you are serving Christ your Lord. Your attitude about work and your work ethic displays your relationship with Christ. Remember the context of Ephesians. Since chapter four, he has been describing how we live out what God has done in us by walking worthy of our calling, putting away old life patterns and deceived desires and seeking to be filled with the Spirit. The way you display Christ in life is by seeking to be filled with his Spirit daily by thirsting for Jesus, filling yourself with Scripture, and praying.

Finally, employees display Christ by work expectantly, we see this in verse eight, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Though you, your work, or your service may not be recognized by others, your heavenly Master recognizes it and will reward you! Any good done in this life, the fruit of your relationship with Christ (Eph 2:8-10), never goes unnoticed. God rewards his people for faithfulness (Mat 16:27).

**How Employers Display Christ (9)**

Then Paul instructs masters to treat slaves justly and fairly as they would want to be treated (9; Col 4:1). We see this in verses nine. In other words, masters follow same instructions. Stop being abusive and treat them as you would want to be treated if you were in their shoes. Do this because their heavenly Master is yours too and he judges impartially. Partiality and discrimination were written into Roman law and masters had rights, privileges, and wealth that slaves did not. He is calling employers to display Christ in their leadership by treating employees well. Be good to them, create a good work environment, pay them well, knowing that Christ will richly reward you in eternity with the fullness of joy and happiness that money and reputation will never buy.

Whether you are an employee or employer, God is calling you to display Christ in your work.

Response:

* Employees, what are you displaying in the workplace?
* Employees, what are you displaying in the workplace?
* How is God speaking to you?

**Life Group Questions:**

1. What are some differences between slavery in Paul’s context and American slavery?
2. How does Paul undermine slavery?
3. How does Paul instruct slaves/employees to work?
4. Which of these points impacted you the most?
5. How does Paul teach masters/employers to lead?
6. How should this passage change the way we work? Explain.
7. How should this passage change the way we relate to people?
8. How should this passage change the way we evaluate what’s important?
9. Ask for prayer for your own work situation, your employer, employees, etc.
10. How is God speaking to you in this message?
11. How does this passage relate to you own discipleship?
12. How does this message help you in making disciples?