

Spirit-Filled Management

Eph. 6:9

Intro. Some people have strange ideas about pastors. They imagine our only work experience is confined to the cozy environment of a church building where everybody tries to be, you know, "nice." They think we have no experience with rigors of hard work or the challenge of coping with ornery people and difficult managers. I don't know everything about the other guys, but I know Pastor Robert worked in a furniture assembly plant and Dale worked with home mortgages. Pastor Len worked for Ford Motor Co. and in a small parts factory. Jerry worked 14 years for Ma Bell as a lineman and then as a technician in their switch room. As a teen I started out with a paper route. I mowed lawns / worked for 2 years in the luncheonette at SS Kresge Co. / served as a dishwasher and night watchman at Kings College. Then I climbed to the heights working for General Roofing Co. before starting my own business in Maryland called, *HIS Roofing*. By the way, "HIS" stood for Home Improvement Specialists. But to my partner and me it had a primary meaning. It meant our little business belonged to God...it was *His*. At the bottom of our contracts, we printed **Prov.15:16** which says, "**Better is a small portion with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.**" This little verse opened the door for conversation with many of our customers. And oh, by the way, the Lord blessed *His* business abundantly. He enabled us to provide income for some needy fellow students! So I say all this to help you know us a little better and to dispel any notion that we don't know what it's like to work outside church walls where not everybody is "nice."

Last time we considered God's instructions for workers. Even though these verses were first written to Christian slaves and masters in the slave economy of the ancient Greco Roman world, the principles apply to employees and employers today. In fact, in a system that offers workers many rights and privileges while protecting them from unfair and unsafe labor practices, they apply to an even greater degree. If God instructs Christian slaves to obey even when their masters were unbelieving and cruel, we can be sure He wants Christian employees to obey their employers.

Few biblical instructions are more down to earth and practical than these. John MacArthur writes...*"In our day the struggle between employers and employees has reached monumental levels. Conflicts rage between workers and management, with each side accusing the other of selfishness and unreasonableness. Employees want smaller work loads, fewer hours, more vacation, and more pay and benefits. Employers want more productivity, more profits, and greater control of management policies and practices. Both sides want lower taxes for themselves while expecting greater government protection and sometimes even subsidy. It is not hard to see that the heart of the problem on both sides is greed."*

Yet there's nothing new or unique under the sun. Much of the letter written by James addressed the conflict between wealthy land owners and those who worked for them. In **4:1, 2** he put his finger on the same issue that stirs up workplace conflict today. He wrote, **What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.**

Last time we found that Christian employees must submit to their employers three ways. We should *do our work with respectful obedience* because **vs. 5, 6** say, **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.** We should *do our work with whole-hearted excellence* - because **v. 7** says, **Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.** And finally, we *should do our work with anticipation of reward* - because **v. 8** says, **because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.**

As we've said many times, the commands for husbands, wives, children, and parents are based on the command of **5:21** where God's Spirit says to every believer, **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**. The actual doing of this command is based on the command of **v. 18** - which says, **Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit**. So the most basic need we have as Christians is to live a Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled life. The wisdom and power to live a life that is holy, distinct, and honoring to the Lord is not in us. That's why **Col. 3:16** instructs us to **let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly** and why **Eph. 5:18** instructs us to **be filled with the Spirit**. The power to be singing / thankful / and submissive, comes from God. Wives who respect and support their husband's leadership and husbands who love their wives sacrificially are people who walk with God. The same is true of children who obey their parents and parents who are careful not to exasperate their children. In a world where distrust and hostility between labor and management is universal and almost genetically inherited, God's word challenges us to break the cycle. Christian workers are instructed to obey their employers and approach their work as though they are working for Christ...because in fact, we are!

The common denominator in these relationships is a living and personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the power of His Spirit. God doesn't expect the unsaved world to conform to these principles but He does expect His people to practice them. Essential to these commands is believers who sanctify Christ as Lord in every relationship. As we've said many times, the formula for the Christian life isn't trying hard...it's trusting deep. The sinless, perfect life and ministry of Jesus was lived in utter dependence on His Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus is the example we must follow. If He depended on His Father for everything, it's foolish for any of us to think we're good enough or self-sufficient enough to go it alone. We urgently need the filling of His Spirit.

So having given instructions to believing slaves or Christian employees ...Paul addressed believing masters or managers. Now remember, in the ancient world of the Bible, about 1/3 of the Greco-Roman population were slaves. As the Good News spread from person to person and house to house, many slaves came to faith in Christ. Along with the forgiveness and spiritual freedom found in Christ, Christian slaves were tempted to think their faith set them free from slavery and from earthly masters. Their expectations were unrealistic. Paul wrote to correct this. In fact, the book of Philemon is all about the return of Onesimus, a runaway slave who had come to faith in Christ.

According to the NT, believing slaves were not to think poorly of themselves or be dragged down by their station in life. Though they were to remain as slaves, they were to be better and more productive slaves than they had been before they trusted Christ. They were to show respect as they obeyed their masters in the flesh. If a Christian slave had a legitimate opportunity to be set free, he should grab it. But if a believing slave was owned and bound to a master, he/she should not seek to be liberated. The light of their new life in Christ was to shine right where they were. Their mission field was their master's estate. In that place they could be used of God to testify to other servants and members of their master's household. The same applies to each believer today. We must see our place in this world as a mission field where people are in urgent need of Christ.

Yet the NT repeatedly emphasizes the perfect equality of those who are saved and **in Christ**. **In Christ**, earthly distinctions are gone. **1 Cor. 12:13 - For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. / Gal. 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. / Col. 3:11 - Here (in Christ) there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all**. Believing slaves were never to be accused or to think of themselves as 2nd class citizens! There's no such thing! As we transport this truth into our world today, it doesn't matter what your occupation is.

In Christ, hamburger flippers / custodians / salesmen / trash collectors / factory workers / doctors and CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are just sinners saved by grace. The ground is level in Christ and **God is no respecter of persons**. The more our minds are changed to think as God thinks, the more these earthly distinctions will disappear. We often quote **II Cor. 5:17**, but listen to the verse that precedes it. **II Cor. 5:16, 17 - So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** To those who escape a sinking ship by climbing into a life raft, distinctions are irrelevant. Rich or poor / red and yellow black or white / white collar or blue collar / squeaky righteous or morally scarred...earthly distinctions are irrelevant in Christ. He is our life raft...our ark of safety! Amen?

So having written to employees, Paul now addresses **masters** or managers in **v. 9. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.** The command to **treat your slaves in the same way** means masters must also apply the principles of **vs.5-8**. What goes for employees goes for employers too. We've seen this paradigm all through this section of Paul's letter. A wife must submit to her husband and show respect to his God-given leadership. But a husband must also submit to his wife. He must do this as he loves her sacrificially by putting her needs and interests ahead of his own just as Jesus did for us. Children must submit to and honor their parents by listening to them and obeying their instructions. But fathers must also be submissive to their children by disallowing heavy-handedness or by making unreasonable demands. Employees must submit to their employers by respectful obedience and by earnestly endeavoring to fulfill their employer's expectations and wishes. You see, no believer in any position escapes the command of **5:21** which says, **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

So now in **v.9**, employers are instructed to submit to their employees by showing them proper respect and refusing to threaten them. Read the verse with me...**And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.**

Once again, the phrase, **treat your slaves in the same way**, means instructions given employees also apply to employers. Both workers and managers must recognize and fulfill their assignments "**as to the Lord.**" We all must remember our true master is Christ. He is the one who sees / evaluates / and rewards all that we do. Once again, this realization prevents us from compartmentalizing our lives as though our work life is less important than our church life.

I know I'm beginning to sound like a broken record. (For the benefit of the young people...a record is a vinyl audio recording device that when scratched or damaged tends to play the same line over and over until the needle is bumped to a different groove.) So I'm stuck in the groove that insists the base command is **5:21** where every believer is commanded to **submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**. And why should we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ?...because in Christ there's no difference. In Christ there are no superiors or inferiors. Christ is Lord, He is the CEO, He is number one. Our love and loyalty belongs to Him. And our CEO has explained how He expects us to relate to others in marriage / our homes / and our workplaces. He instructs wives to submit to their husbands / husbands to love their wives / children to obey their parents / fathers to not exasperate their children / employees to obey their earthly employers and earthly managers to treat their employees with respect. This comes from the top. That's why **5:22 - 6:9** includes the phrases...**out of reverence for Christ - 5:21 / as to the Lord - 5:22 / just as you would obey Christ - 6:5 / as if you were serving the Lord - 6:7**. Like a bold watermark, behind every relationship, we're encouraged to see Jesus. In whatever form submission applies, it must be done for Him or because of Him!

So just as we found three instructions for employees, we now find three instructions for employers or managers. Let's read **v.9** again. **And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.**

1. Relate to them the way you want them to relate to you. - **And masters, treat your slaves in the same way.**

This instruction sounds like the "golden rule" Jesus taught in **Matt. 7:12** where He said, **...in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.** Obedience to this single command would solve most conflicts in the workplace. Imagine how different things could be if workers and management practiced the golden rule. Back in **6:5** - Paul wrote, **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.** Notice the three attitudes a slave or employee should show his master or manager...**respect / fear / and sincerity of heart.** So these same attitudes must be found in a manager's relation to those under him. Now let me ask, *"Have you ever met somebody who didn't want to be treated with respect? Have you ever met someone who thrives on disrespect?"* The manager who wants to be respected by his employees must show them respect. This is basic.

But consider the second attitude...**fear.** The word **fear** in **v.5** can be misleading. In this context it doesn't mean a trembling fear or dread. I think Murray is right when he says, *"An element of fear enters into all relationships when their essential sacredness is realized."* Think of it this way...in every earthly relationship we are dealing with a commodity that is most valuable to God...people. That's what relationships are. They're connections between people. So here's the thing...in handling that which is most valuable and loved by God, we have the potential to be an agent of good or an agent of evil. In every relationship we move the other person closer to Christ (which is God's will for us and them) or we provide them with excuses for keeping God at arm's length. So the fear that is proper in every relationship is sober concern. Its concern that we not mess up the opportunity entrusted to us.

Paul acknowledged the power of a believer's influence when he wrote to the Corinthians and said, **II Cor. 3:2 - You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.** Peter recognized the power a believing wife has in her marriage. He wrote **I Pet. 2:1,2 - Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.** So in this context, **fear** means earnest concern. It's relating to people carefully and redemptively. Its being careful to love them as God loves us.

The third phrase in **v. 5** is **sincerity of heart.** Honesty of purpose and whole-hearted effort must be found in managers as well as employees. Not every work situation is the same, but generally speaking, managers are respected more when they roll up their sleeves and interact with their employees instead of barking orders from an air-conditioned office. And by the way, the same Greek word is applied to secular work and the spiritual service of Christians. The division or dichotomy between secular life and spiritual life is artificial. Christ must be lord of every dimension of our lives...in church and away from church. This sincerity or singleness of heart points to a heart that isn't divided. Barclay says, *"Christian workers and managers should be passionate to have every single piece of work they produce be good enough to show to God."*

2. Refrain from threatening them. **Do not threaten them**

Paul here touches on something very practical.

It was common in the ancient world for a master to threaten slaves who were forbidden to answer back. One commentator wrote, *"threats came very easily to the lips of masters."* Threats were like whips in a master's arsenal. Threats were as intimidating as the crack of a whip. I love to read the commentary on Ephesians written by D. Martin-Lloyd Jones. He wrote, *"It's possible to threaten people without saying a word. A harsh way of looking at them, or general brusque behavior can amount to threatening. To keep them rigorously in their position of subordination to let them know that's where they belong, and that they are going to be kept there; to hint to them that had better be careful - all this can be done though you may never raise a hand, or swear or curse or shout; you can do it by your spirit, by your whole demeanor. The Christian master, says the Apostle, must never behave in that way, he must never be unfair in spirit..."*

3. Remember that we have a master in heaven to whom we all must give account - since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Managers must remember that they too are servants. Believing managers are also workers who must someday give account to their heavenly master. Their ambition must be to manage in a way that pleases the Lord. The same rationale is found in **Col. 4:1 - Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.** In **Jas. 5:4** - earthly managers are urged to know that the way they treat their employees is seen and heard by God - **Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.** So managers should remember they must give account to God someday.

But managers should also remember the example of Jesus. No one ever walked the face of the earth who deserved to be called "master" more than Jesus! Yet Jesus was the servant of God and man. In **Lk. 22:27** Jesus asked His disciples a question. He said, **"For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."** Jesus taught His disciples that the way to greatness is down. He modeled humility, gentleness, and a willingness to sacrifice so others might benefit. As we study the way of Jesus with twelve ordinary men, we see that Jesus is the perfect manager. He didn't throw His weight around like so many do. He didn't threaten or make unreasonable demands. He didn't confine Himself to a plush office from which He issued His orders. Jesus came out on the floor with his men. He rolled up his sleeves and demonstrated the life He asked His followers to replicate. He exercised patience and empowered His men to fulfill their calling and become the men God created them to be. So both Christian workers and managers must learn to be Christlike. In **Matt. 10:24, 25** Jesus said, **"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master."**

I wanted to flesh this out a little so I went online. There I discovered a helpful checklist for employer-employee relations. The checklist was compiled by Betsy Barbieux. Her website advertizes her as a trained behavior specialist and certified image consultant. She works extensively with corporations and schools. As I read her checklist, the suggestions sounded almost biblical. When I hunted around for some biographical information, I found just what I suspected...she's a born again believer who works extensively with LifeWay Christian Ministries. While speaking in public schools and to personnel in secular corporations, her confidence in God's Word shines through. But that's what we've been saying all along. Christianity is 24/7 and God's truth applies to every dimension of our lives. At the heading of the list, Betsy writes...*"Pay attention because this checklist can also be used with your spouse, children, and friends!"* I've reproduced her recommendations on the back of our sermon notes because they're so helpful and down to earth and worth taking home. Let's take a look at them.

1. *Treat others with respect. Never talk down to employees as if they were stupid. Correct privately, not publicly. (That's just what **Eph. 6:5** says)*
2. *Reward progress. Progress is a moving target. Reward any forward progress. Some personality types need affirmation and encouragement along the way, not just at the end of an assignment. Don't wait until progress is 100% correct or complete to affirm, encourage or reward. (Isn't that what God does? He faithfully rewards the good things we do.)*
3. *Practice empathetic listening. Listen for the motive and attitude, not just the words. Convey a sincere desire to understand. Be quick to listen, slow to speak. (That's **Jas. 1:19!**)*
4. *Be aware of the workload. Don't overload your best worker. Just because someone can do the job doesn't mean he/she is the right person for the assignment. If too much work is left undone, you (the manager) have a time management problem, not an employee problem.*
5. *Provide adequate, ongoing training. Practice does not make perfect. Correct practice makes perfect. Training them one time is not enough. Train, retrain, and review constantly. Grandiose expectations without adequate training exasperates employees the same way a parent can exasperate a child.*
6. *Be generous with honest praise. Find something to praise every week. Tell them. Praise does not lead to complacency. Perhaps you've heard me say, "the best way for a husband to compliment a wife is frequently." The same is true concerning employees.*
7. *Encourage teamwork and practice teambuilding. Ask for ideas or suggestions. Create an open forum for brainstorming new ideas. Implement the feasible ideas and changes. Communicate and explain changes as much as possible. Find out what motivates each person. Create ways to reward that are specific to the motivations. Managers have a big responsibility to create the ideal workplace. Having to create this in a diverse community of workers is an even greater challenge. But many have done it and so can you.*

Don't you wish every boss or manager practiced the recommendations on this checklist? Wouldn't workers find their work to be more enjoyable and wouldn't their efforts be more productive?

One verses as we finish. One is **John 10:10** where Jesus said, **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.** We can't overstate the blessing and fullness that comes into the lives of those who obey God's Word and are filled with the Spirit of Christ. The world, the flesh, and the devil are like thieves determined to strip life of joy and blessing. But in Christ we find life in the fullest sense. Have you trusted Christ as your Savior? Have you allowed Him to enter your life and fill you with His wisdom, power, and love? Like a gentleman, Jesus waits to be invited. He waits for us to realize how much we need Him.