

## Romantically Challenged Part 5 - W.O.R.K. at Work 03.13.11

Ephesians 6:5-9 ESV

Video: "The Christian's Guide to Excuses - Work"

**Introduction:** We come today to our final session in the Romantically Challenged sermon series. We have talked about demonstrating love in the relationships that count most to us: Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children. The Apostle Paul takes it one more precarious step - into the workplace realm of relationships between employer and employee.

There could be no more timely topic for us. For the past month our headlines have been filled with the issue of collective bargaining between state employees and their respective states, from Wisconsin to our own Ohio. The sports pages are now leading with the contractual disagreement between professional football players and the NFL. Even our local paper is headlined with local layoffs and contract disputes. *I am keenly aware that these issues not only divide union and owner but our entire country - not only on the statehouse steps, but also divide parent from child, husband from wife, brother from sister, and parishioner from parishioner.*

Yet God's Word in Ephesians 6:5-9 has great wisdom for us as Christ-followers **regardless of where we stand on the issue of collective bargaining!** Let's study God's Word together with open minds / hearts.

**What about Masters / Slaves?** We don't read 5 words of today's passage before entering controversy. "*Slaves, obey your earthly masters.*" What about the issue of slavery? How could the Word of God NOT immediately speak to the injustice? We view this issue of slavery through our 21-century biased lens. But in the 1st century:

- Slavery as an institution was not questioned as unethical
- fully 1 out of 3 people in Greece and Italy were slaves.
- Not all slaves were treated poorly; many had great freedoms.
- Owners often treated slaves as children (and children as slaves.)
- Most slaves did not come from piracy, but by birth
- Many slaves were better off than freedmen
- Some sold themselves into slavery as a faster way to get ahead
- Slaves themselves could own property... including other slaves!

Still one could argue correctly that slavery as an institution is not right. As Americans we are deeply committed to one's "inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." How could the Bible condone it? Important answer: the question addressed in today's passage is NOT about the righteousness of the institution of slavery, but about the righteousness of the people within the institution of slavery. How do masters show their love to slaves? How do slaves show their love to masters? This is an important distinction for us today, because we will NOT decide about the righteousness of either side of the collective bargaining question. BUT WE WILL TALK ABOUT the right relationship between employers and employees. How do we love one another despite our differences?

**To understand today's talk well, we must remind ourselves of the three basics of walking in love for the Romantically Challenged:**

**Real Romance:** Showing Christian love to one another. We must look at today's discussion of employers and employees within the framework of what Paul has already written:

1. Real Romance **SEEKS THE BEST** for someone else.

*“Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”  
Ephesians 5:2a ESV*

This immediately turns every negotiation between employer and employee on its head. We are raised - whether we know it or not - within the assumptions of the Free Enterprise system. Each party will act within its own selfish self-interest. Combine that with freedom and people will always seek the lowest prices to pay out and the highest prices to be paid in. But real romance seeks the other party's best. What a difference our negotiations would take if our greatest efforts were to seek and know the other party's point of view.

2. Real Romance **SEEKS GOD'S HELP** and pleasure.

*“Walk as children of light... and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”  
Ephesians 5:8b, 10 ESV*

Of course the above presupposition is at best difficult within the family - where love is more readily emoted - and absolutely impossible in the workplace, where seeking my employer's or my employee's best may not seem to be the best for my own family. To be able to juggle these conflicts **REQUIRES GOD'S HELP!** What an amazing difference it would make if I entered every negotiation with the attitude, “I'm too selfish to be able to do this well, so God - fill me with Your Spirit so I might be able to please You today!”

3. Real Romance **REQUIRES INTENTION AND ACTION**.

*“Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”  
Ephesians 5:15 NIV*

How do I remain aware of God's even bigger plan - of His kingdom coming to Earth? How can I be a part of that plan? Not accidentally! I have to intentionally make the most of every opportunity. No place is this more effective than when my own selfishness raises its ugly head. **As hard as it is to practice at home, it's even more difficult at work. The rest of this evening is addressed to...**

***Does my Christian faith W.O.R.K. at work?***

- W** **ORSHIP** by the way I do my work.

*“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,... rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.” Ephesians 6:5,7 ESV*

We have a misguided opinion of worship as something we do when we sing at church. But real worship is something accomplished 24/7. Worship demonstrates its own authenticity when practiced in the workplace. The Apostle Paul tells us that, as employees, we should approach the job we do as if we were *rendering our service to the Lord!* And not as if it were to man. Would this make a difference in the kind of job you would do... if you knew that it would be Jesus Himself Who would be conducting your performance appraisal?

with fear and trembling. There should be an awesomeness to our work. Our Creator Himself is watching the job we are doing! The Psalmist writes, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" - Psalm 2:11. That's how we do our jobs! As to the Lord. With the same reverence that the woman with the issue of blood fell before Jesus (Mark 5:33), that the jailer fell before Paul and Silas after the earthquake (Acts 16:29), and that Paul preached to the people of Corinth (1 Cor. 2:3).

with a sincere heart. I worship God in authenticity. He doesn't want our fake worship, right? He doesn't want us acting one way at church and another way at home, and yet another way at work! If Christian employees really practiced this kind of worshipful work ethic, then they should be *the most valuable workers available!* Because employers would know that they are always getting their employee's best efforts... **which leads us to:**

**O** **ORDAIN** my work as service for my real master.  
"Not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Ephesians 6:6 ESV

Being sincere / authentic means we don't do our best work only when the boss is around or when it might give us the greatest opportunity for advancement. Christ-following employees are not people-pleasers... *they are Christ-pleasers!* Christians recognize that their real master is The Master and that they are not just employees but they are servants of Christ!

As a result they ORDAIN their work. They set aside their work as if it were a worship offering to God... for that is exactly what it is. In the same way that we talked about husbands loving with a *sanctifying love* a few weeks ago (setting aside their love for their wives as something very special), Christian workers set aside their jobs as ordained. We think of pastors as being "ordained" - meaning their jobs are set aside for the Lord's work, right? We need to rethink this. All of our work, according to 6:6, is ordained, because everything we do on our job we do sincerely, worshipfully as servants of Christ.

**R** **REMEMBER** myself where my real compensation comes from.  
"Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free." Ephesians 6:8 ESV

Here the Apostle Paul turns our economic world upside down. We don't do a good job *just because it will lead to greater financial rewards from our employer* (though it often will!), but because there is a much bigger picture in God's economy. Whether my boss pays me my worth or not, the Bible gives us an AMAZING PROMISE! If I do good I WILL receive back from the Lord. Not should. Not maybe. Not possibly. Not if the economy is doing well. I do something good. The Lord pays back this goodness.

Summary: So I concentrate my efforts *not just for my earthly boss*, but for my heavenly Lord. He is my real master. I am His servant. I give Him my best - even if my earthly master doesn't deserve it. My Lord does deserve my best! With sincerity. With reverence. With a desire to please God. And knowing He will repay good with good.

**Note transition to masters. God repays good of the free too...**

K **NOW** my own accountability for the way I treat employees.  
“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.” Ephesians 6:9 ESV

The Bible switches its attention to the world of the master, the boss, the employer. This is an amazing statement for the first century because there was no place where the master and the slave were ever on the same social or societal footing... except in this new thing called “church” where *“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).*

So what is the end effect of all being one in Christ Jesus? WE ALL HAVE THE SAME MASTER! You may be my master here on earth, but in heaven... and in heaven’s kingdom coming to earth... we both stand equally before Christ as servants. So masters here on earth, be careful how you handle your authority here. Everything that applies to employees and how they should do their job... (1) Worshipful; (2) Ordained; (3) Reminded of good rewarded... all this applies to bosses too!

Therefore, stop your threatening! Don’t hold your position of power over your employee knowing you hold his/her economic future in your hands. Remember that God doesn’t treat you any differently than he does your employee... and that means for the good too! You do good and know that you will be rewarded for it!

**Conclusion:** In the midst of contractual disputes, political turmoil, arguments about the union’s rights versus the employer’s rights - these words from Ephesians might seem quaint, out of touch, and impractical. Nice words with no real impact.

Or you may hear these words and immediately think to yourself ‘if only the other side would apply these words... then my life would be so much better.’

Today I challenge you with this question: Where does it start? Forget everyone else and whether they are right or wrong. Apply it only to me. Where am I at? Does my Christian faith really W.O.R.K. at work? Do I treat my job - as employer or employee - as if it were my WORSHIP to the Lord? Do I treat my job as if it were ORDAINED, set apart as something special - pleasing to the Lord? Do I REMEMBER that God always repays the good, even when I don’t immediately see it? Do I KNOW that I stand accountable for the way I treat others?

This is what Jesus had in mind. The workplace today can be the place where we best demonstrate the love of the “Romantically Challenged” but the “Redeemingly Changed!” Live out the new creature you have become, not just at home, not just with those who love you, not just with those who agree w/ you, but with those who would use and discard you.

**Jesus from Sermon on the Mount:** “In a word, what I’m saying is Grow up! You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.” Matthew 5:48 The Message

**Let’s Pray.**