

SLAVES AND MASTERS

INTRODUCTION

We have been dealing with Christian life over the past weeks. We dealt with offense, the need to belong and friendship. Today, I want to look at the workplace. As I prepared I felt the Lord leading me to speak about workplace relationships between employers and employees as well as Christian ethics in the workplace and in business.

The Bible has much to say about the labourer and his employer, the slave and the master and I believe that as we apply these principles, will not only make our workplace a happier place to be but will also release the Lord's favour over the businesses that we work for or even own.

God is our source. Without Him, we can neither own, and run a business, nor work in a business to the best of our potential.

Deuteronomy 8:18 New Living Translation (NLT) Remember the Lord your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath.

Let us look at what God says about our behaviour in the workplace

MESSAGE

WORK IS A REFLECTION OF GOD IN US

I found this example of how we reflect God's characteristics as we work on Ministry 127.com:

Your work is an expression of the image of God in you, and it's worth thinking about how your work reflects His character. Work as simple as cleaning out a closet reflects the God who makes order out of chaos. Holding a stop sign for children to cross the road creates an environment of safety that reflects the God who protects. The person who flips burgers is providing food, which is something that God does. A father or mother who nurtures a child reflects the love, patience, and perseverance of God. The CEO of a large business holds things together and moves things forward. This too is a reflection of God's work.

On the other hand, here is some humour on bad work ethic:

The sign in the store window read: NO HELP WANTED. As two men passed by, one said to the other, "You should apply—you'd be great."

Or maybe you heard about the guy who said, "I never like to drink coffee on the job because then I toss and turn at my desk all day."

THE RIGHT EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE

Ephesians 6:5-7 (NKJV) Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

The workplace comes with many challenges, pressures fears and struggles and sometimes it's difficult to remain motivated. Paul reminds us to work with a Christian ethic regardless:

- He said – “Obey your masters according to the flesh” - Obey the workplace rules and policies. Obey the law of the land too.
- “With fear and trembling” - Have respect for your employer, manager and colleagues (even if they don't earn it).
- Be sincere, as you would be for Christ Jesus - Don't work hard only when people are watching. Work properly all the time.
- Serve with a good heart – with goodwill - Remember to work as a God-pleaser, not a man pleaser – that means you will be doing God's will with a good and a clear conscience.

Ephesians 6:8 (NKJV) knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Our God is a rewarder. When we do good, He rewards us by doing good for us.

Have we been working in this way? Do we run down our boss every time we get a chance? Do we realise there is power in our words? When we curse our workplace there are consequences for us too.

THE RIGHT EMPLOYER/MANAGER/SUPERVISOR ATTITUDE

Ephesians 6:9 (NKJV) Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and He has no favourites.

In the modern workplace there are not slaves, but employees. The masters are the employers, the managers and supervisors etc. but the principle remains the same. Subordinates must be treated with respect and must not be bullied.

- I sometimes see people being nothing less than corporate slaves.
- Bullying into unfair performance contracts, unrealistic expectations, expecting one person to do the work that two or three people should do are not uncommon practices.

Remember Ephesians 6:8 - the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. Therefore, whether we are employer or employee, manager or subordinate, let us treat those we work with in a respectful manner, so that the Lord can reward us for doing good.

Do we need to review how we are treating those who work for us? Even normal households in this country have domestic servants, gardeners and other people working for them – As Christians, are we treating our staff fairly and with respect? We will get from God the same as what we give to others.

HONESTY IS OF KEY IMPORTANCE

Proverbs 16:11 (AMPC) A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all the weights of the bag are His work [established on His eternal principles].

God is the one who made things measurable. He created units of measure and the ability to weigh things. It's part of His divine order and eternal rules and principles. Man found ways to crook scales and measurements in order to take advantage of people for dishonest gain, and when man does this, He steps out of God's divine order.

- Some other dishonest practices are bribery, corruption, fraud, outright theft.

Proverbs 11:1 (AMPC) A false balance and unrighteous dealings are extremely offensive and shamefully sinful to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.

Can we say this morning that we stand blameless before the Lord in terms of our business dealings?

Let us do what is honest and right in all our business dealings, whether it be as an employer, or an employee. Any form of dishonesty is offensive to God, but God will bless what is done with honesty and integrity.

OUR WORD IS OUR BOND

Matthew 5:37 (NKJV) But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Jesus taught us to be people of our word. A simple "yes", or "no" should be adequate when we are people of our word. A business will develop a good reputation when it does what it says it will do, and charges what it agrees to charge. Problems start when we over-promise and under-deliver.

Psalm 89:33-34 (NLT) But I will never stop loving him nor fail to keep my promise to him. 34 No, I will not break my covenant; I will not take back a single word I said.

Our God will never break His promise nor go back on His word toward us. Let us reflect His righteous character by being people of our word and fulfilling all we promise. This will result in a good reputation with man and favour in God's sight.

Are we people of our word?

PAY A FAIR WAGE

1 Timothy 5:18 (NKJV) For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer is worthy of his wages."

Profit is the motive of most businesses, but when the drive for profit results in people being oppressed through unfairly low wages, then the business is running contrary to Biblical principles and God cannot bless it. The labourer or employee is worthy of their wage.

Malachi 3:5 (NKJV) And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien—Because they do not fear Me," Says the Lord of hosts.

Those who exploit wage-earners (employees) are categorised alongside sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers and those who exploit widows, orphans and foreigners. God will judge them!

Do our employees earn fair wages and salaries? Are we blessing those who work for us and proving that our master is God and not mammon?

EARN THAT SALARY!

Romans 4:4 (NLT) When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned.

Many employees will identify with this scripture. We work for and deserve our salary. But what we need to remember is that we do get paid, and if we want to be blessed in our workplace, we need to ensure that we are doing the work required to earn that salary.

Proverbs 11:18 (NKJV) The wicked man does deceptive work, But he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward.

Let us not work half-heartedly, or deceptively, pretending we are busy. Let us busy ourselves doing the work that God has provided for us. Then God will bless the work of our hands, giving us a sure reward in terms of salary and build treasure in heaven.

TAXATION, A NECESSARY EVIL!

Matthew 22:21 (NKJV) They said to Him, "Caesar's. " And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Paying tax is not pleasant, but it is necessary. Sadly, too many businesses and individuals think it's okay to cheat on taxes, but Jesus said, "give to Caesar what is due to Caesar". Cheating on one's taxes is not only robbing the government, but it also increases the load on one's fellow taxpayers.

Romans 13:1 (NKJV) Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Are we resisting the ordinances of God? Have we honoured God by being honest in our company and personal taxes?

We need to trust God to hold our governments accountable. In the meantime, let us honour God by being honest taxpayers because to do otherwise means we resist God and bring judgement on ourselves.

BE GENEROUS

Leviticus 23:22 (NKJV) 'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God.' "

God wants employers and employees to be generous. We should always be looking to give some of what we earn to the poor and needy. Then we align with God's heart. It's Him who gives us the ability to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18) and we in turn honour Him by helping the needy.

Proverbs 11:25 (NLT) The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

Are we generous? When last did we give to the poor? Do we want to prosper?

The God-ordained principle is that we shall reap as we sow. God will bless our generosity, let us trust Him with our finances as we give freely and generously into the needs of others.

CONCLUSION

There are many principles we can learn from the Bible about our work, and business ethic, I have only covered some today, but as we go out into our businesses and our workplaces let us keep these facts in mind:

- Work as unto the Lord as employer or employee, knowing that God is watching, and will reward us accordingly.
- Be honest in every dealing.
- Let us keep our word – it is our bond and our “yes” must be “yes”
- Employers must pay fairly and employees must do the work required to earn that salary.
- Be generous, whether employer or employee, God will prosper those who are willing to give.

Psalm 37:23-25 (NLT) The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. 24 Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand. 25 Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned or their children begging for bread.