

## **SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD: IN YOUR WORKPLACE**

**Text:** Ephesians 6:5-9

In our series “Seek first the kingdom of God” we restate every week that that phrase means with the highest priority we seek to bring every area of life under God’s rule. We that are saved, have changed kingdoms. The kingdom of darkness was living for the glory and pleasure of self but now that we’re saved, we’ve entered the spiritual realm of God’s kingdom, and He has definite commands for how life is to be lived in all areas. We’ve looked at marriage and home life under God’s rule, now the scriptures turn to a different realm of life, our workplace life.

The text we read has to do with the relationship and labor between masters and servants. During the time of this writing, slavery existed all over the Roman Empire. I want to give you an accurate look at the time and what the scripture is addressing and how it now applies to the day we live in. Slavery in the Roman Empire was pervasive, with slaves making up roughly 20-30% of the population. This kind of slavery was different from what we know from American history as “chattel slavery” where people are owned like cattle, have no rights, and are forced to labor without wages. The kind in Paul’s time recognized that the servants had legal rights and were paid wages. It was not racial because people of all races were subject to it and it was also used to settle debt. It was not permanent because once debts had been settled or the servant saved his wages and bought his freedom, he was released. In the Old Testament, Jacob became Laban’s slave for 20 years to gain two wives and cattle even though they were family.

Today we don’t have anything like that in our culture, but the scriptures are timeless and they do address our workplace life and how we are to live under God’s rule at work. We don’t have master-servant relationships, we have employer-employee relationships. God is a God of order, authority and obedience. He starts with addressing servants first. If you work but don’t own the business you work for, these commands apply to us.

**Servants, be obedient to your masters according to the flesh:**

- **With fear and trembling** – means with respect for authority, accountability and conscientious desire to do what is right.

- **In singleness of your heart** – means to have undivided, sincere focus, purpose, or devotion. It means pursuing your goals with pure intentions and your whole being, rather than being distracted, hypocritical, or being pulled in conflicting directions.
- **Not with eye-service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart** – this warns against working hard only when the boss is watching. Christians are called to display the same level of diligence whether they are being supervised or not. This also condemns only doing a good job just to get ahead. That is a selfish motive, in God's kingdom we do well always because it pleases our King.
- **With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men** – The application of these verses in our modern workplace environments instruct Christians to put forth their best effort, treat superiors with respect, and work diligently. The overarching message is that a worker's ultimate employer is God, transforming ordinary labor into an act of worship and service.

#### **There is eternal reward for temporary service done well in God's kingdom - Ephesians**

**6:8** Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether *he be* bond or free.

If you own the business or have been placed in a position of authority over other employees, the next verse is for you.

#### **And ye masters, do the same things unto them:**

- **Do the same things unto them** – Treat those under you with respect and fairness. Mutual accountability
- **Forbear threatening** – Masters are instructed to give up manipulative, demeaning, or fear-based methods of control. Authority should be exercised justly rather than through intimidation.
- **Equality before God** – Paul reminds master's that their earthly positions don't make them superior in God's eyes. Both masters and servants share the same "Master in heaven".
- **Impartiality** – God does not show favoritism based on social or economic status. Everyone will be judged and rewarded equally based on their faithfulness.

The book of Philemon is a short, one-chapter letter written by the Apostle Paul from prison to his friend Philemon. Philemon had a runaway slave named Onesimus who had also stolen from him that got connected with Paul in prison. Paul was able to lead Onesimus to Christ in prison and now he is urging Philemon (also a Christian) to welcome him back. Not as a piece of property but as a beloved brother in Christ.

