

Faithful Employees, Fair Employers

5 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, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free. 9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Eph. 6:5-9)

A stat that came out a few years ago found that South Africans work an average of 43 hours a week. That was in fact, the fifth highest in the world, behind only Turkey, Columbia, Mexico, and Costa Rica. But one does wonder how those hours are spent. A book called *The Day America Told the Truth* revealed some of the work ethic of Americans. It found that only 1 out of 4 employees gave his or her best on the job. The average worker wastes about 20% of their time on the job, effectively meaning they are only at work four days a week. If that is America, a country that is still the economic leader of the world, what do you think the statistics would be in South Africa?

If there were such a thing as a perfectly Christian work environment, it would be characterised by two things: faithful employees, and fair employers. Faithful workers, and fair owners. Faithfulness and fairness are like the two balancing poles you have in marriage: loving sacrificial leadership by the husband and loving submissive assistance by the wife. Similarly in child-parent relationships: respectful obedience by children, and unprovocative training and nurture by the parents.

Faithfulness and fairness, if they were both present, would not make a problem-free utopian business. You would still have problems aplenty, just as a godly marriage and a Christian family has plenty of problems, trials and upsets.

But what you would have would be a place where sin is minimised, where evil is restrained, where honest work thrives, and where God is glorified by the relationships and attitudes of the believers there.

Like most marriages and most families, it is rare to find both there at the same time. Fair employers find themselves up against competition from unfair employers. Fair employers find themselves fighting with unfaithful employees demanding more and giving less. Faithful employees find themselves labouring for unfair and harsh employers.

Many Christians actually find themselves in both roles: an employee of superiors, but also responsible for managing others. But whether you are solely an employee, solely an employer, or doing a bit of both, the great principle of marriage is equally true for you: you must do right, no matter what the other does. You must be faithful, whether you are treated fairly or not. You must be fair, whether people are faithful or not.

When this passage in Ephesians was written, it was written to those under very harsh working conditions. During the Roman empire, slaves had no rights, no pension, no leave, no salary, no benefits, no labour arbitration groups, no unions. In God's providence, this Scripture was given during a time when workers' rights were minimal at best. The implication is that all believers who follow can see that it definitely applies to them. If they could obey these commands, then we can as well.

And on the other end of the scale, the management, ownership side, you had masters who had free reign over their slaves. They could do what they wanted to their slaves. If these people, who would face no legal consequence for mistreating their slaves, were told to treat their slaves in a God-pleasing manner – how much more should we in an age of government-enforced workers' rights.

This passage will give us two approaches of faithful employees, and two approaches of fair employers.

I. Faithful Employees Submit Sincerely

5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;

The very first thing that God wants us to know about our work lives is the relationship of submission to authority. We have masters according to the flesh, which simply means human masters. We are told that we must obey them, with an attitude of fear and trembling, which means genuine respect and reverence, and we are to do it with real sincerity, as if we are obeying Christ.

Sincere submission is not obeying with a plastic smile, but a heart burning with rage inwardly. In the parallel Scripture in Colossians 3, Paul says, 22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh,

All things. Not selective obedience. Not intermittent obedience. All things.

Now what that means for a Christian is that we need to obey respectfully, cheerfully, and from the heart in all things. The all things doesn't include sinful things, but it does include stupid things.

Your boss may give you tasks that you think are stupid, unreasonable, foolish, a waste of time but unless what he asks you to do is sinful, you should do it. What will honour God is when you do it from the heart.

The way to do this is to practice the invisible-man trick. When you are told to do something really stupid or meaningless, what this text tells you to do, is to momentarily make your boss invisible and see Christ standing behind him or her. It is Christ giving you this task, to test your humility. And as you see Him there, you receive grace to do this. You are not ultimately doing this for this boss, but for Christ. So you do it: thoroughly, completely, cheerfully.

That helps us to see that this submission does not depend on the kind of boss we have.

18 Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (1 Pet. 2:18-21)

Now, consider what kind of masters some slaves had. Masters that beat them mercilessly. Masters that gave them a ration of corn every day as their meals, for their whole lives. But Scripture says that a Christian is to submit in all things, with fear and trembling, as unto Christ.

Now part of the way we can judge if we are submitting sincerely or not is the presence or absence of grumbling.

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, (Phil. 2:14-15)

Grumbling is the most common language spoken at work. When you don't speak it, your co-workers will be amazed. They know that you know certain expectations are unreasonable, certain demands are foolish. Grumbling reveals that our humility and submission was just an outward show, a pretence, but inwardly, we are as rebellious as ever.

But when you don't grumble, you show that you believe Christ has given this command and you are

not going to grumble against Christ. It shows that you are submitting sincerely, seeing past the manager and the boss, and seeing this as coming from Christ, to grow your humility.

Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed. (1 Tim. 6:1)

Now does that mean that we should never respectfully ask our boss to re-consider? No, the Bible certainly has examples of godly believers making an appeal against foolish authority. Abigail appealed David's decision to take revenge on Nabal. Jonathan appealed the decisions of his father Saul. Esther appealed the king's decision to have the Jewish people killed. Paul appealed the Roman decision to try him in front of the Sanhedrin. Believers can thoughtfully, and respectfully speak to our authorities, usually in private, and ask them to reconsider. But if they do not, then we submit, even if we disagree.

There's a lovely scene in C.S Lewis' Prince Caspian where Trumpkin the dwarf is a sceptic. He doesn't believe that blowing a magic horn will bring any help, and he thinks it's a waste of time to send soldiers to see if any magic help has arrived. But Prince Caspian insists that they should blow the horn and send people to see who arrives.

At that point, Trumpkin says, "Send me, Sire, I'll go."

"But I thought you didn't believe in the Horn, Trumpkin," said Caspian.

"No more I do, your Majesty. But what's that got to do with it?...You are my King. I know the difference between giving advice and taking orders. You've had my advice, and now it's the time for orders."

We submit sincerely. But faithfulness goes beyond the attitude of submission in our relationships. It extends to the quality of our work in our responsibilities.

II. Faithful Employees Serve Sincerely

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, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free.

Sincerity must affect not only our responses to our superiors, but the actual work we do when no one is looking. That's why Paul says we should not be those who work with eye-service as men-pleasers.

This literally means – 'sight-labour'. You work only when supervised. You work only when held accountable by a manager who keeps checking up on you. This is a kind of unbelief. Isn't God in the room at all times? Doesn't Proverbs 15:3 say, "The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good."?

In other words, eye-service, men-pleasing work is not sincere work. It doesn't work as to the Lord. In another sense, it isn't really only working for men. It is only pleasing men insofar as they will not fire me, or let me keep my job, or give me money at the end of the month.

When we are man-pleasers, and work with eye-service, we can be guilty of other sins.

⁹ *Exhort* bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all *things*, not answering back, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. (Tit. 2:9-10)

When we are not submitting or serving sincerely, one of the things we do is answer back. We argue and contest everything. We have to always make the statement that we are independent and wouldn't do it this way, if it were up to us. But the second thing you'll notice there is the danger of pilfering. Petty stealing from our boss.

This is the attitude that says, "They pretend to pay me, so I pretend to work." They steal from my family, so I steal from them. There are plenty of ways that people quietly steal from a company.

Taking stationery or equipment from your work to your home and never returning it. Using office phone lines, office printer for personal matters without permission. Purposely going on lunch early and coming back late. Distractions that siphon off literally hours from a productive day: Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp chats, games, tracking the news and personal emails all day long. You can look like you're working and be doing almost nothing. One study found that workers are wasting up to 22 hours of their workweek

"When you kill time, remember that it has no resurrection." A.W. Tozer

A Christian keeps a slogan over his head when he works. It reads, "God is my audience. God is my rewarder." That's what makes us well-pleasing, showing all good fidelity, adorning the doctrine of God. That's how we live out Ephesians 6:6: 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,

23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

We work steadily, creatively, efficiently, and diligently. We do it for Christ, and knowing that there is a payday coming for the work we do that is not the end of the month: it is at the end of our lives, at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

Sincerity is to be guileless, to be pure in heart, not double-minded, not fickle, two-faced. What you are on the inside is what you are on the outside. You don't have to like your work, or even find your boss winsome and charming. You look past them to submit sincerely, and to serve sincerely. That's being a faithful employee.

III. Fair Employers Lead Benevolently

And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Eph. 6:5-9)

Masters are to seek the welfare of their servants. "do the same things unto them". In other words, the servants are commanded to do their best to benefit their master. So masters are told, do your best to benefit your servants. Manage your firm, lead your group or your team, but not in a way that harms and destroys those people.

One of the ways you do that is to give up a worldly kind of leadership. You see it here in the words, "giving up threatening". There is a kind of leadership that can only operate through fear: through threats of danger and punishment. Only through domination and threats of no pay or lost earnings, or no job does this leader get obedience.

But God frowns upon this. He told Israel in the Law: `You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God. (Lev. 25:43) (ESV:)You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God. (Lev. 25:43)

But in fact, Jesus told us that this is not strength.

25 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. (Matt. 20:25-26)

Christian leadership is persuasive. We persuade, we do not force. Christian leadership is exemplary: we show how it is done as well as telling people to do it. And Christian leadership is sacrificial: we bear a greater cost than those we expect should follow us.

If you manage people with persuasion, with an example of wisdom and a godly life, and by demonstrating that you are more committed than those you are leading, you are leading benevolently.

Your leadership will serve and bless others. You will be like the words of David in 2 Samuel 23: 3 The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men *must be* just, Ruling in the fear of God. 4 And *he shall be* like the light of the morning *when* the sun rises, A morning without clouds, Like the tender grass *springing* out of the earth, By clear shining after rain.' (2 Sam. 23:3-4)

You will refresh people, not tax them. You will strengthen them, not drain them. You will lead them, not simply use them.

Once again, the way you do this is by the invisible man trick. You see this employee who may be sub-standard, who may be frustrating, disappointing, who didn't listen, didn't perform, was slack, sloppy. You make him invisible and see Christ, your master standing there. How do you want Christ to treat you for your failures, mess-ups, and even deliberate disobediences? You know you don't want harshness, cruelty, unkindness. You know you might have to face the music, but how do you want your Master to treat you? That's how you treat that employee.

But what about a chronically rebellious, sloppy, irresponsible, incompetent, inept, inefficient employee? Does leading benevolently mean you keep tolerating that behaviour? No. If they are genuinely struggling to do the job, you can coach and correct, but eventually if you must, you will need to dismiss them with dignity. Likewise with lazy and irresponsible employees. If you keep those employees in the company, it is ultimately unloving to others. Others must keep covering their mistakes and doing their job for them. In a competitive market, your company can collapse if you keep inept workers around indefinitely, and that would mean many more jobs lost. Besides, workers who are failing usually know the truth and feel miserable. They might have gifts that could be used elsewhere, and the shock and jolt of dismissal may help them overcome their poor performance.

Leading benevolently avoids the two ditches we are prone to veer into: sentimentality, where we feel sorry for people or feel guilty about letting people go, or brutality, where we are unnecessarily harsh and demanding, even with our good and faithful workers.

Fair employers lead benevolently.

IV. Fair Employers Reward Promptly

Col 4:1 Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Fair employers pay their people what is fair. In a market economy, a fair wage is how much the market wants those skills. That will differ from country to country and place to place. It won't always correspond to our needs, or our life circumstances. But an employer is being fair when he pays what the market is generally paying for those skills. You may choose to pay more, in kindness and generosity. But you should always avoid paying people less than what is a fair market-based

wage. And you should never be among those who take labour and then refuse to pay for it.

4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. (Jas. 5:4)

It can be tempting to hire desperate people, or immigrants or people willing to work for far less than their work is worth. It will help the bottom line. But again, Scripture says, give them what is just and fair. You, too have a Master, and He is your provider.

Fair employers don't only pay fairly, they pay promptly. **Lev 19:13** `You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.

Yes, the longer that money stays in the bank, the more money it earns. Yes, it's tempting to keep it there for as long as possible. But people set up their lives based upon payments coming in at the expected time. They have bills to pay, debts to service, necessities to buy, medical bills. To hold it back can cause great pain and harm to others. That includes not just your employees, but if you have them, your suppliers, your creditors.

Sometimes the reward is not simply money, but praise: words of affirmation, commendation, and praise bring refreshment to many a tired employee's heart. Don't be sparing in praise if you want them to be lavish in work. Sometimes the reward can be rest: giving a loyal and hard-working employee an afternoon off, or some leave, or just some relaxed responsibilities.

Fair employers don't guarantee faithful employees. But they do encourage it, and make it easier to be one. Faithful employees don't always result in fair employers. But they may often provoke employers to greater fairness. But whether you are a faithful employee, or a fair employer, or both at the same time, you will be doing the most important thing in the world: glorifying God with your life.