

Exegetical Notes – Ephesians 6:5-9

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Ephesians 6:5-9

Verses 5-8

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

- This passage is part of the passage which begins in Ephesians 5:21. Slavery was a common practice in the time when the New Testament was written. It is neither condemned nor approved by the writers of the time. It is simply accepted as fact. It existed. In the time of the American Civil War, each side took the scriptural silence on slavery as Biblical support for their cause. The south argued that since the scripture did not condemn slavery, it approved of it. The north argued that since the scripture did not approve of slavery, it condemned it. This is called an argument from silence. But the fact is the scripture simply did not condemn or accept the practice. It did recognize it as common practice.
- Therefore, since slaves were common, even in Christian households, in the table of household rules, the Bible addresses how Christian slaves should behave and how Christian slave owners should behave.
- The practice of slavery is no longer common in our part of the world. Therefore, one might assume that this passage is no longer necessary among those who do not own slaves. However, there are still parts of the world where people own other people. Therefore, this passage should be understood. Just because we live in an area of the world where slavery is no longer practiced, for the most part, we still need to understand what the Bible says here.

- The problem is that this passage outlines the relationship between employees and employers, too. So, we, in the western, slave free world, should see these passages as addressed to employees and employers.
- Employees should obey their employers with respect and fear with sincerity of heart, JUST AS THEY WOULD OBEY CHRIST. The idea is that employees submit to the authority of their employers as they would submit to Jesus Christ.
- Employees obey their bosses not just to benefit themselves but because it is God's will. They do what they have been hired to do to please Christ. They know that doing their job will bring God's blessing on them.
- The assumption here is that Christian employees have Christian bosses. In such case, the boss would not ask his employee to do something which is outside of what God allows. The relationship of both employee and employer to Christ is assumed here. If your boss asks you to do something which the Bible forbids, a Christian employee cannot comply. But under all other circumstances, a Christian should be a superlative employee, doing his or her job as if he or she worked for God.

Verse 9

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.

- In the same way, employers should treat their employees. They should not threaten or bully their employees. They do this because they know that Christ is their master, too. They know that Christ does not show them any special favor. They are to treat those who work for them as Christ would treat them.

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