

Ephesians 6:9 –Being an employer in modern times

Calvin, Gaebelin, TSK, GreekLexicon, Abbot, Handfuls, Barnes, Rienecker, Clarke, Eclectic, Gill, JFB, Henry, Poole, Robertson, Trapp, Hendriksen, Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus: In the West we are raised in capitalism, which largely interpreted, is an economic system where one is free to own and operate a business to make money. When that system is put in place, apart from the Word of God, it is then translated to mean **making money by any legal means**. This has resulted in oppression around the world in the name of capitalism.

The argument for maximizing profits by any legal means is this: **We don't force anyone in Bangladesh to work for us** and they can leave anytime they want, so **if we pay them \$1.50 per day and they want it, then we are justified in what we do**. This is abusive. We can summarize capitalism apart from God's Word in this way: If something were legal, it must be moral.

On the other hand, you see the abuse of people through socialism and communism around the world, where the government is the only employer – an **employer with the elusive goal of creating utopia and making everyone rich and happy**. If people don't subscribe to the total control of the economy by a few elites, they are thrown in prison, starved, or killed. **More than 100,000,000 have been killed or starved** under this corrupt system. This is not surprising. It is **an economic system that is set in opposition to God's Word**.

So how does God address employers? You will hear about this today.

Our headings are:

Who were these masters?

What was the work of these masters?

How did God warn these masters?

Our goals: **That you, because you belong to Jesus, will treat your employees in such a way that they will praise God.**

Who were these masters?

9 And you, masters...

1. "Masters" here refers to owners of semi-slaves or full slaves.

2. Some of these "masters" were members of the church!

Apostle Paul **knew people in the church were not perfect**...but they were **not barred from membership**. In fact, he wrote a letter to Philemon, who owned a slave named Onesimus, urging him to show mercy on Onesimus.

3. Let me make a point clear: God never supported slavery but he acknowledged its existence and promoted its abolition.

God commanded and encouraged marriage, having children, and keeping the Sabbath Day.
He didn't do this for slavery!

4. Why didn't God command the masters to end slavery immediately since it was so bad?

a. Mercy! It would have been worse to abruptly end something so ingrained in society. It would have been cruel to the servants who may have spent much of their lives, if not all, in slavery. The freed servants would have had nothing – no money, no home, no other skill, etc. It would have been chaos. The British used the Apprenticeship System at the end of slavery to transition slaves (4 & 6 years) into normal societal life. Slaves worked for their masters **and** got training to live independently.

b. Patience! God worked to expose the wickedness of slavery, controlled how it was run, and required his servants to preach about the equality of all men. There is neither Jew nor Gentile...he said.

This was similar to what men like Wilbur Wilberforce did in England to end slavery. First, they exposed the horrible **conditions in which slaves were being kept in Africa** and they **exposed the disease and death on the Middle Passage**, the journey from Africa to the Caribbean-sometimes 1/3 dying. This caused the English government to end the slave trade. Then **they exposed the mistreatment of slaves in fields and homes**, and **urged preachers to raise awareness of the equality of all** men before God. This ultimately led to the ending of slavery. God wanted a heart-change, not a mere legal change.

5. Lessons:

a. "Masters" refers to anyone over you in your workplace, so this includes supervisors or bosses. In a broader way, this includes civil authorities, elders, and judges.

b. Just as there were Christians who owned servants, a calloused thing, there are Christians – even Christian employers- who may not be living perfect lives and are abusive and unfair to their employees. This is a reality.

c. Don't hate these "masters," even if they are abusive. Let God sanctify you through them. Be patient with them. Help them. Pray that God will open their eyes to their abuse and unfairness and that they will repent.

What was the work of these masters?

9 ...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.

1. Masters were instructed to "do the same thing" that servants were expected to do!

Specifically...

2. Masters were instructed to do good to their slaves, as slaves were to do for their masters.

They had to be **fair in their treatment and in their payment to slaves**. They could not simply do what the law allowed and say that was enough. The same warning goes to those who employ children working in the cobalt mines in Africa for less than \$1.00 per day.

3. Masters had to do good from their hearts (as slaves were required to do) as God was watching the master's heart!

Outward kindness was not enough. God was watching the master's heart!

4. Masters were instructed not to constantly threaten their employees.

So when masters gave every order to their servants, they had to make sure those orders were consistent with the heavenly order! They could not be abused or asked to do something beyond their ability. So in a society where bondservants had very few rights and were often kicked about as with little value – as chattel, God made it clear how his people were to be treated!

("Giving up threatening" means to "relax" or "loosen up.") They were to remember God was watching the master's lips also!

5. Masters were given many illustrations of how to be masters and serve those under them.

a. The Lord washed the feet of his servants. That is a picture to follow. (John 13)

b. A Roman centurion showed how much he cared for his servants – even going to one who was perceived to be an enemy to get help for his sick servant! And do you remember Jesus' words of description of this man?

Matthew 8: 5...when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, 6 saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." 7 And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. 10 When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, **I have not found such great faith,** not even in Israel!

c. History shows weeping and mourning among servants when their master died, masters who cared when their servants were sick or suffering, as if they themselves were. Many left inheritances for their servants or even willed them their freedom.

6. Lessons:

a. Today we err when we allow people to get out of debt by civil law (bankruptcy). The state is not a source of mercy but a source of justice. They should not legally allow debtors to avoid repaying debt to their lenders. Hard work is the answer.

b. Bosses and supervisors are to serve and pray for their employees, encourage, serve, and be humble before them. They are to pay them fair wages for fair work. **Employers should not be quick to fire an employee as soon as profits dip...**and **employees should not flee as soon as they get a better job that pays more.** That's the way the secular world works!

c. Making money is not a bad thing, in and of itself. God had many friends who were

rich – like Abraham and Solomon. God made them rich. So don't envy someone with money. That breeds socialism. Don't revel in poverty either. Be productive.

d. While rich people often like to mix with other rich people, God reminds bosses they are men just as their employees. Don't treat your employees as less than **children of the God of the Universe.**

e. Supervisors in the workplaces are often the key! They stand up for the people and they represent the boss. They can be most instructive to both. Don't abuse your authority. Don't undermine the boss.

How did God warn these masters?

1. Masters were warned Christ was watching to see if they ignored their responsibility to their employees.

The masters' Master was in heaven. The slave's Master was in heaven. Their master was the same.

Leviticus 25:43 '**You shall not rule over him with rigor,** but you shall fear your God.

2. Masters were warned they did not get any privileges with God because of their wealth or position.

God shows no partiality to the rich or the poor! Masters were fellow servants with their own servants before God.

1Peter 1:17 And if you call on the Father, **who without partiality judges according to each one's work,** conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

Colossians 3:25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and **there is no partiality.**

3. So because Christ was watching masters, and because he did not give them any special privileges because of their positions:

a. Masters were not to treat their slaves as "property."

b. Masters were not to treat their slaves with different skin color differently. Skin color did not matter to God. Masters had to remember God's salvation was for the whole world! Look again.

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

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that

God shows no partiality.

c. Masters were to remember both master and servant would die and become dust and both would stand before Christ in judgment! Neither one had privileges because of his former earthly condition.

d. Masters were to lighten the load on their servants. This was setting the stage for abolition of slavery.

3. If the masters did these things, the servant would more likely work with more sincerity and effort.

4. Lessons:

a. Servants (public servants, private servants) are no less children of God than masters (employers). Employees are not property. They are not a commodity. God treats all people equally and does not show favoritism. A boss is not better than a janitor, nor an elder better than a member, nor a judge better than a citizen simply by his position. So bosses should take warning. We are all children of God.

b. Every cruelty or unfair treatment against one in a lower position is cruelty and unfair treatment to Christ, and for which an employer must give an answer. So don't panic or get frustrated and act wickedly if you are abused in your workplace. A wicked boss will get what he deserves.

c. At the same time, God does not hate rich people or people in high positions. (Though this might be the mantra from university professors.) **God hates sin and God hates sinners.** God defines sin!

d. Employers hold an important position in our society. They are there by God's design. Honor them. Do not covet an employer's wealth. Don't demand that you get a "fair share," - code for socialism and stealing from the rich. Don't blackmail a boss by hurting his business, as trade unions often do in strikes.

Conclusion:

Masters were expected to consider who they were and use that as a principle in how to care for their slaves. Both masters and slaves were brothers in the same kingdom, with the same Gospel, the same faith, in the same covenant, in the same church, and with the same Lord! **Masters were to be humble, caring, and seeking to please their heavenly master as they oversaw their servants!** They were not to be tyrants over them.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ:

a. If you are a boss, elder, supervisor, political leader, or judge, these warning are to you: God is watching! Treat your employees fairly. Remember, you're from the same dirt as your

brother. You don't get any special privileges to do wrong because you are powerful. You will be rewarded based on how you treat those under you.

b. If you are an employee or under an elder, politician, or judge, remember you don't get special privileges because you are poorer, or because you are under authority. God is watching you too! Your reward will be based on how you endure the difficulties of your life.

c. When you do your job well, as employee or employer, as one with authority or one under authority, Christ's kingdom will grow like it should.

d. Do your job well because you are Christ's! He paid for your freedom with his own blood.

Finally, no one escapes God's eyes. So if you are not a Christian, God sees every sin you commit. The only way you can be freed from that judgment is if you plead for Christ's death as your death. If you do, God will remove your sins and make you his child! **When you are his child, you will then be able to please him with your life.**