

The Christian Employer

Paul here teaches us how a person with authority or influence lives out the Spirit-filled life. His words in this text are especially applicable to leaders in the work place.

Ephesians 6:9

9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

There are 21 million bosses in the US and 24% of them are supervising workers who would love to fire their bosses! Being a boss, or a leader of any kind, is terribly important to the Kingdom of God. Parents, teachers, supervisors, civic leaders, upperclassmen in schools—all of us need to put into practice what the Apostle here teaches.

We learn here that:

I. Christian employers are the servants of their workers (9a)

Being their servants, we:

a. We promote them aggressively

("Masters, do the same to them...")

What does Paul mean by "the same?" It is our attitudes of sincerity, whole heartedness, and enthusiasm for the welfare of those behind or below us. It is the respect due another human being in their role in life. It is none other than the Golden Rule.

We treat employees like family. We provide not just motivation, but engagement in their work:

1. Living wage. Do we treat them like the stakeholders (rather than just the shareholders) they are? Do those who work in our houses and yards, e.g., have medical insurance?

The recovery from the last downturn has been the most uneven in recent history. The 1.2 million households whose incomes put them in the top 1 percent of the US saw their earnings increase 5.5 percent in 2012, according to census estimates. In that same year, earnings fell 1.7 percent for the 97 million households in the bottom 80 percent — those who made less than \$101,583. The growing divide between the rich and the working poor is an enormous problem, both in our nation and also worldwide. Businesses (and non-profits) must make some hard decisions to resist impersonal market forces and treat their employees like true stakeholders. This would include paying at least a living wage for their minimum wage, providing medical benefits, and retirement programs. The problem of excessive CEO salaries is aggravated by sheer greed, the same sort of selfishness that inspires some politicians to do what's expedient rather than what's right, some pastors to preach what's popular rather than what's true, some newspaper editors to print what gains readership rather than what's fair and accurate, and some teachers to pass students rather than to train them. Greed affects us all. The best answer for all these injustices is for us to receive Jesus' unselfish love and then to embrace His Lordship over every area of our lives.

2. Healthy conditions. Do we expect only reasonable working hours for our employees?

3. Words of encouragement. Do we give positive feedback—constant, specific, and timely?
4. Opportunities to advance. Are we seeking the personal development of our employees?

b. We correct them respectfully

("...and stop your threatening...")

The first century method of motivating slaves often involved intimidation, beatings, and being sold and separated from family. The first century philosopher, Seneca, once said to all masters, "all slaves are enemies." But Paul teaches us a very different way. When we seek to motivate and/or correct our workers, we:

1. Assess honestly: a) ask good questions, don't jump to conclusions, b) empower the employee to make his/her own decision, c) explain the consequences of failure, d) show the way and e) offer our help.
2. Obtain honest feedback from our workers regarding our performance as supervisors

Studies show that unkind criticisms, threats, and anger get short-term, superficial responses. But the Gospel method produces the best long-term results.

II. Christian employers are the servants of the Lord (9b)

("...knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.")

a. We are all on level ground before the Lord

There are many reasons to treat employees respectfully, but the big idea here is that we are all slaves of the Lord Jesus, and, therefore, are on common ground with all of our workers.

b. We are all held accountable to the Lord

The Lord has treated us kindly, and He will judge us on whether we have put His grace into practice in all our relationships. Our Lord is impartial. He does not "raise His face" to the wealthy and powerful and lower His face to the weak. We must seek to please an audience of one.

c. We all must imitate the Lord

Ultimately we are deeply moved into humble action because our Master became one of us, suffered and died on our account, and won for us a mighty victory that has secured for us eternal riches. How can we not walk in His faithful steps?

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it vital that Christians in position of influence and leadership put the Apostle Paul's words into practice?

2. What are the key ways in which Christian supervisors show clearly that they are their workers' servants?

3. Describe a really good supervisor you have had in the past. How was he/she most unlike the typical supervisor?

4. What are the keys to giving criticisms that are truly constructive?

5. In what ways has Jesus modeled for us this way of leading?

Going Deeper

1. How do you most urgently need to change your leadership style to imitate Jesus' style?

2. Who will hold you accountable for these changes?