

EMPLOYERS & EMPLOYEES

Life Class (Lesson 6)

During biblical times, people were self-employed, contract laborers, or servants obligated to a long-term service. A contract laborer is seen in the parable of the field hands who were hired to harvest grapes (Matthew 20:1-16). Servanthood, or slavery, was generally entered through some obligation: a person might have incurred too much debt and had to sell his services to meet his obligation, he might have been on the wrong side of a battle and was captured, he might be learning a trade as an apprentice, or he might be earning something that he could not normally afford, such as Jacob's fourteen years of service to Laban for the right to marry Rachel (Genesis 29:15-30). The length of service lasted until the obligation was fulfilled. It could last a few years or could be a lifetime of service.

Most of the Bible's comments on employment focus on servants or slaves. Outside of self-employment, it was the most common form of labor. While the circumstances of employment are not exactly the same today, we still can learn from the instructions given. We tend to favor contract employees -- people who are paid in return for service. Our contracts are often open-ended allowing an employee to work for a company as long the employer and the employee desire to continue the relationship. In this we have it much easier than the servant. A servant was stuck with his master until his obligation was fulfilled. We don't have to stay with an employer we don't like; we always have the option to walk out on a bad boss.

Masters / Bosses / Employers

Col. 4:1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

. Those in charge are to treat those in their care justly and fairly. As you would like God to treat you, so should you treat those under you.

James 5:4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

Those hired deserve their pay. When bosses mistreat their employees, such as not paying what is owed, God promises to hold the masters accountable

Mal. 3:5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts.

God required masters under the Old Law to pay their employees in a timely manner.

Lev. 19:13 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.

In addition, masters were not allowed to threaten their servants.

Eph. 6:9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Again the basic principle remains: as a master treats those under him, so will God treat the master. But unlike human masters, God will always be just. He does not give special treatment to masters over their slaves.

Servants / Slaves / Employees

Col. 3:22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **23** Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. **25** For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

A similar principle is applied to the servant that was applied to the master. A servant is to work for his master just as if he was working for God directly. Since God is all-knowing, a Christian worker will give honest labor throughout the day -- not just when he knows the boss is looking. They are not seeking favor from their bosses, such as getting in good with the boss so as to get a promotion. Instead, they give full effort because they are working for God -- knowing that this service will likely please earthly bosses as well. A Christian's effort is to be sincerely given.

Eph 6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; **6** not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. **7** With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, **8** knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

How many employees truly respect their bosses? Yet, most of us choose our bosses in a limited fashion; at least, if you don't like a boss, you always have the choice of walking out the door. But in a society where few could choose their masters, Paul tells servants to treat their bosses with respect.

Respect is especially due when your boss is also a Christian.

1Tim. 6:1 All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against. **2** Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.

Now in case you think that these rules only apply to good bosses:

1Pet. 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. **19** For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. **20** For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. **21** For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

Matthew 7:12 "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.