

# ROCK GROUP BIBLE STUDY

September 5, 2003

## **Walk in Wisdom [Part 5] "Spirit Filled Labor Relations"**

### **Ephesians 5:21 & 6:5-9**

*5:21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ....*

*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. 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..*

**Remember** Paul taught that the believer should not be controlled by physical substances such as alcohol, but instead should be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Paul then discussed the natural result of those who are controlled by the Spirit. Those who are controlled by the Spirit will manifest a worshipful attitude (vs. 19), a thankful attitude (vs. 20) and an attitude of submission (vs. 21).

Paul then applies this attitude of submission to the lives of believers with three different illustrations. He first applies it to the husband/wife relationship (Ephesians 5:22-33); then the parent/child relationship (Ephesians 6:1-4) and lastly to the master/servant relationship (Ephesians 6:5-9).

Here in Ephesians 6:5-9 as Paul applies the idea of mutual submission to one another to the master/servant relationship, we by extension today can apply this passage to employer/employee relationships.

· ***Who does Paul first address in verses 5-8? What people does Paul address here?***

Paul first addresses slaves/servants. The term [DOULOS] simply means "*bond servant*." Paul is here addressing those bond servants who are part of the Roman institution of slavery. It is important to keep in mind that the Roman institution of slavery was nothing like the slavery that took place in America, during the 19th century. Roman slavery generally was not oppressive and was primarily economic in nature. 1/3 of all the people in the cities were slaves and 1/3 were former slaves.

· ***What is the appropriate behavior for Christian servants?***

**OBEDIENCE!** Paul commands the servants to be obedient to their masters. The term *obey* [HUPAKOUO] literally means "*to hear under*." It is the idea of listening to attentively and responding positively to what is heard. It speaks of one hearing under the authority of someone else. The verb therefore, comes to mean, "to hearken to a command, to obey, to be obedient to, to submit to." This is a present active imperative in the Greek. The present emphasizes that it is to be a continual action. It commands a habitual, consistent obedience. The active emphasizes an absolute obedience, while the imperative mood emphasizes a command. It is a hearing with submission, and yielded in obedience to masters.

· ***What do the following passages emphasize regarding the idea of submitting to and obeying our masters?***

1 Peter 2:18-20 -- We are to be respectful and submissive regardless of whether our master (employer) is reasonable or unreasonable. We are to patiently endure when we are harshly treated.

1 Timothy 6:1-2 -- If our masters (employers) are believers then we are to be all the more respectful and obedient.

Titus 2:9-10 -- The character of Christian employees toward their employers should consist of submission, being well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, and showing good faith.

· ***What does the phrase "according to the flesh" emphasize?***

The intent of this phrase is to emphasize that, while the authority-submission relationship is important and to be respected, it is only temporal. They are only our masters "*according to the flesh.*" It lasts only in this life and does not apply to moral and spiritual concerns at any time or under any circumstances. [MacArthur, p. 326]

· ***According to verse 5, what is the appropriate attitude that servants are supposed to have in obeying their master?***

1) The believer's attitude should be one of fear and trembling. This is not an attitude of cowering fright before one's earthly masters (employers), but it is an attitude of honor and respect directed to the Lord. When we work, we should strive to honor the Lord in our work. That is the appropriate attitude.

2) The believer's attitude should be one of a sincere heart. This is not hypocritical, but genuine and thorough. The idea is to strive to do your work well without complaining, bragging, criticizing others or in any way being disruptive. It is the idea of working heartily! The focus is that of serving Christ!!! To serve one's employer well is to serve Christ well.

· ***According to verses 6 and 7, what principle should servants adopt in serving their masters?***

"That they are serving the Lord rather than men." They are **not** to serve by way of eye-service or as men-pleasers, but as slaves to Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. It is the same as Gerry addressed in Colossians 3:23, "*Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men.*"

1-We must seek to avoid a temporal perspective, but have an eternal perspective as we are working!  
2-We must seek to avoid a self-serving perspective, but focus on having a God-serving perspective.

As 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "*Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*" We are to be more focused on God's will and seeking to do God's will rather than seeking to please men. We are to be God-pleasers not men pleasers. We are to render service with good will as to serve God, not as to serve men. Although we are serving men, our focus should be that we are doing this for the Lord.

· ***What assurance does Paul emphasize is given to the diligent worker striving to please and serve the Lord?***

"Whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord." God will reward the believer appropriately for his hard work. God knows of your diligence and He will reward you for your diligence. No one will go unnoticed for the Lord will reward each one for the good he does. However the reward spoken of here is not experienced in the present, but has a future reality. It is likely that this is referring to the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10) where believers will be judged for the good deeds they have done. We can be assured as we have worked heartily unto the Lord, that at some future time, He will reward us.

· ***Who does Paul address next, in verse 9?***

Paul moves on to address Christian masters. The term *masters*, [KURIOI] refers to those who have authority over the servants. There were not likely very many of these Christian slave-holders, although some did exist (i.e. Philemon).

· ***What is Paul's Two-fold instruction to Christian masters in verse 9?***

1-They are to do the same things to them. They are told to act in the same manner and with the same spirit as their servants. In other words they were to treat their servants with the same Christian principles and consideration that the servants should show their masters. The antecedent of the phrase "*the same things*" most likely is the command in verse 6, "*doing the will of God from the heart.*" A Christian employer's relationship to his employees should have the same motivation and goal as a Christian worker's relationship to his employer, which is the desire to obey and please the Lord. An employer is to use his authority, "*as to the Lord,*" just as workers are to submit to authority "*as to the Lord.*" That is an expression of their mutual submission in being "*subject to one another in the fear of Christ*" (5:21). [MacArthur, p. 329]

2-They are to give up threatening. The term used here suggests the idea of loosening up, or releasing. He uses his authority and power as little as possible and does not throw his weight around or lord it over those under his charge. He avoids being abusive and inconsiderate. [Cf. MacArthur, p. 329]

· ***Why are Christian masters to follow through with Paul's instruction here?***

Because they know that they just like their employees/servants are under the same supreme authority of God. Both servants and masters on earth serve the same Master in heaven. The faithful Christian master knows that he is a fellow servant of Jesus Christ along with his employees and is likewise accountable to the same Master. He also knows that there is no partiality with God. God plays no favorites. Believers who are controlled by the Spirit whether husbands or wives, parents or children, employers or employees are to be mutually submissive to one another because they are equally subservient to a common Master, their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

## **Questions for Application**

· ***When have you faced a situation where you were required to obey the wishes of your employer? How did you respond?***

· *What is your motivation when you follow the desires of your employer?*

· *If you are a supervisor, how fairly do you deal with the people you manage? Are there any ways you can improve?*