

# WHO AM I?

Ephesians



## Who Are You Really Working For?

### INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 6:5-9

Have you ever thought about how a slogan like, “good help is hard to find,” ever got started? It must have started because, in fact, good help is hard to find! And, why is good help hard to find? Because people are basically self-centered and self-serving. They usually don’t put the interests of their employer first, unless it somehow benefits them. And so employers everywhere complain that good help is hard to find.

It works the other way, too. Good jobs are hard to find. Why? Because employers are basically self-centered and self-serving. They do not often put their employees’ interests first. And so it is rare to find a job where the employer genuinely cares about your welfare.

The apostle Paul wrote our text to show how Christian workers and bosses should treat each other. Granted, it is addressed to slaves and masters, not to employees and employers. Slavery was an accepted institution in the Roman world, where it has been estimated that between one-third and one-half of the population were slaves. Critics of the Bible attack Paul because he did not condemn slavery directly. But if he had done so, it would have led to armed revolt and the Christian faith would have been stamped out as an anti-slavery movement.

Instead, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, did something else: he addressed both slaves and masters directly and showed how their faith should radically change the way that they related to one another. As Charles Hodge observes (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans, p. 370]), as both sides treated one another in this Christian manner, “first the evils of slavery, and then slavery itself, would pass away as naturally and as healthfully as children cease to be minors.”

But although our text was written to slaves and masters, it applies directly to employees and employers. It shows practically how those filled with the Holy Spirit, who subject themselves to one another in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:18, 21), should relate to one another in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

### OPEN IT

1. Without giving names of specific people, what’s the most difficult work experience you’ve ever had?

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon by Steve Cole. Found at: <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-54-working-god-ephesians-65-9>



# APPLY IT

Before we try to apply what Paul says to our own lives, we have to understand what first century slavery was like. It was not like slavery in American history. It was complex and massive in scope. American slavery was primarily racial and lifelong. In Paul's day it was not racial, and it was not always lifelong. It is estimated one-third of the people in a city like Ephesus would have been slaves.<sup>2</sup> Paul brings up the relationships between slaves and masters in the same section as relationships between husbands and wives and children and parents. This makes sense because many slaves were basically "domestic servants" who served as actual members of households. It was common in the first century and would have been awkward for Paul to ignore. Many first century slaves would take their masters names and gain the same social status when they were freed.<sup>3</sup> Slaves in the first century were more a socioeconomic class than a racial class of imprisoned forced labor. Though slavery in the first century was riddled with inequalities and injustices that needed to be overcome, in some homes, slaves enjoyed considerable freedoms, rights, and responsibilities. In some cases, they would have looked more like contract employees. They sometimes worked as tutors, nannies, cooks, or gardeners. In other words, the reason most Christians could tolerate the institution of slavery in the first century was because in many cases it was tolerable. Unlike the brutal race-based slavery in later history, first century slavery did not necessarily strip humans of their dignity or reduce them to mere pieces of disposable property.<sup>4</sup>

**7. Describe your reaction when you read Paul's words about slavery and you don't see him say slavery should be abolished?**

**8. What are some differences in slavery in Paul's day and slavery in American history?**

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 160–61.

<sup>3</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Galatians, Ephesians*, Volume 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2015), 292–94.

<sup>4</sup> Swindoll, *Galatians, Ephesians*, 293.

We have to remember, the book of Ephesians was written to Christians. These are people who have been raised from death to life (Ephesians 2:4-7), saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8) all through Jesus' death on the cross (Ephesians 2:13). They are transformed people who now have the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. And so do we! That completely transforms our ability to honor God at work.<sup>5</sup>

**9. How does your attitude about work change given the ability you have through the Holy Spirit?**

**10. Paul describes several ways for slaves to work (see Question 2 above). Employees should keep these in mind too. Which one challenges you the most? Why does it challenge you?**

**11. What are specific ways you can change the way you work, given what you've read in this passage?**

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<sup>5</sup> Merida, Platt, and Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 166.

Employees should show proper respect for their employers and should not try to take advantage of them. Every worker should devote his or her full attention and energy to the job. The best way to be a witness for Christ on the job is to do a good day's work. The Christian worker should avoid "eye service" — working only when the boss is watching, or working extra hard when he or she is watching to give the impression the worker is doing a very good job.<sup>6</sup>

**12. Why does it dishonor God when we work harder when the boss is looking and less hard when he or she isn't?**

Christ is not just the model Servant; He is the ultimate Master also! What kind of leadership did Jesus execute? Servant leadership. He displayed the attitudes those in leadership should follow. He came to serve. He took up the towel. He cared for the vulnerable. He did not seek earthly praise. He was a shepherd, not a dictator. Leaders may have the opportunity to be harsh with employees, bend the truth and make unethical decisions, but they should avoid these as they model Christ's leadership.<sup>7</sup>

**13. Paul tells masters to treat their bondservants with kindness and respect. How do you think non-Christian masters would have responded to Paul's words?**

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<sup>6</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 55.

<sup>7</sup> Merida, Platt, and Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 168.

**14. Describe a situation in which an employer has shown you respect and kindness.**

**15. Describe a situation in which an employer has *not* shown you kindness and respect.**