



Sermon – May 24, 2020  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Ephesians 6:5 – 9*

*Galatians 1:10*

*Philippians 2:7 - 8*

As you grab your seat, let's grab our Bibles. We're going to be back in Ephesians, chapter 6 starting again in verse 5. And I just have to say as we start this morning, God is on the move here at Central. I mean to see a baptism and watch what He is doing in rescuing sinners, to see our Hispanic ministry back meeting again on Tuesday nights, to be able to gather with Life Groups this weekend, to enjoy some fellowship time together, God is on the move. And the way He's doing that is through His words this morning. And I want to call your attention, we're going to read the same passage that we followed through last week because we're going to look at several different aspects of these verses about the way that Paul talks about the kingdom at work. So if you'll follow along with me in verse 5, here's what he has to say.

<sup>5</sup>Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, <sup>6</sup>not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup>rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, <sup>8</sup>knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. <sup>9</sup>Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours in heaven, and there is no partiality with him.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to You in this time, we are praying that You would speak to us through Your word. That Your Spirit would renew our hearts and help us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

Well over the last couple months as our family has worked through the transition from Nashville to College Station, our four boys have been filled with questions. Where are we going to live? Where are we going to go to school? Are we ever going to get to meet any actual kids in College Station? But the one that stands out to me the most is that when we first started talking about the

transition, and I told the boys that the Lord may be bringing me down here to be your next pastor, one of them looked at me and said, “Does that mean you only have to work on Sundays?” And I could see what was going on behind his eyes. He thought, “Hey! This is great! Dad will be free six days a week and only have to spend Sundays working. How much of a great time can we have together?” And that cut to the heart because when somebody asks you or questions you about your work or your work ethic or what you do, there’s a sense of resistance. Of who do you think you are that comes at you whether it’s from a friend or a foe or an adult or a child. Because work is at the heart of what God has designed us to do. We see that from the very beginning in Genesis 1 when God gives Adam the command to be fruitful and multiply, to cultivate the ground, to bring it under dominion. And as we turn our attention back to this passage this morning, we’re going to see the way that Paul was continuing to talk about what it looks like for the kingdom to be at work; how the gospel shapes our jobs. And we saw last week that Paul was addressing slaves and masters. And if you remember, when he is speaking there, he is not affirming slavery as an institution; he’s instead, affirming slaves as individuals. And helping them to understand how it is that this should shape their life in the way that they work. And he tells us right here in verse 8 that he is speaking to both bonds slaves and to freemen. In other words, his principles have a word for all of us this morning. And as we look back at this passage, what we’re going to notice is that Paul gives us three dimensions of how the kingdom should be at work. And you’re going to notice the first one as we pick back up in the middle of verse 6. He uses the phrase there, not by the way of eye-service as people-pleasers.

So Paul, as we talked about last week, has already talked about how the kingdom is at work in your attitude. And now the kingdom is at work in your heart. Now he’s going to speak next of how the kingdom is at work in your eyes. He’s speaking of where we should fix our eyes as we labor. He talks there about how you should not be someone who is driven by eye-service. Paul coins this word here. He’s using it and in the original language, it’s as if he is speaking of someone who is a slave to the eyes of others. Well think about it. These servants that are hearing him speak this would say, “Well that’s exactly what I’m called to do. I’m a servant to the eyes of my master. And when he’s paying attention to me, you better believe I’m hard at work. Because I don’t want to see, I don’t want him to see me slacking off. But at the same time, I am locked on those eyes because that master’s judgement is the only thing that matters to me.” And when Paul speaks here about how we should not be those who are driven by eye-service, the thing that he’s showing us is that the first challenge we face in our work when it comes to our eyes is that we might fix our eyes on the wrong thing. He says, “You should not be fixing your eyes on others.” And that’s especially relevant in a culture like ours that is so gripped by appearances. Whether that’s YouTube stars or Instagram influencers or the perception in your own office place. We often turn things on when the lights are on and the eyes are watching us and can be prone to be lazy or disengaged or not giving our best in our job when we are not being watched. And Paul warns them, “Don’t do that. There is a different path that you are called to.” And it’s one of those situations that’s even centered in our culture in a variety of ways. If you remember, a few years back during March Madness season, when they finally started to be able stream games online and you could watch from your computer in your workplace. One of the things they came out with that very first year was something known as the Boss Button. You remember what that is? You could be watching the game and when you saw your boss heading toward your office, you just clicked the button and it immediately turned the video into a fake spreadsheet so that you could have it right there and have the appearance as if you were working hard without the reality. And that’s what Paul is warning us about here.

That we might be the type of people who labor when we're seen, but don't when we're not. And what he's reminding us of is the fact that God always sees. There is no escaping the eyes from heaven that watch us as we seek to pursue our work faithfully. Because what we need to understand that Paul is showing us this morning, is God watches us as we work. Not just because He's interested in what we produce, but because He's interested in what that produces in us; how our work shapes our own hearts. But Paul gives them that warning about fixing our eyes on the wrong thing. But notice where it goes. He says, "Don't be people pleasers." He also warns them against fixing their eyes on the wrong person. He speaks there of pleasing people. In other words, that as a slave your tendency would be naturally to please your master, to keep them satisfied because you knew if you didn't, there would be bad things that would happen to you. And so when Paul tells them, "Don't be people-pleasers." It's flying in the face of what they would be anticipated to do in that role. But he says, "That should be the case." And we all know human nature in a fallen world. We're wired to be people-pleasers. We want to make others happy. We want to bring them joy. But there's a difference between a good approach to people-pleasing and a bad approach to people-pleasing. So when you are walking well with God and seeking to please others, what are you doing? You're using your gifts for the sake of the joy of others to bring your gifts to bear for their delight. So that you can express yourself in a way that demonstrates your identity, who you are in God. But on the other hand, what Paul was warning us about here is not there. He's warning us about the bad approach to people-pleasing. That instead, what we do is we find our identity through our ability to please others. That we are bound up in the happiness we can create for others. There can be a co-dependency that develops as a result of that where you find your value, your identity, your significance, in how well you're bringing others happiness. And what Paul is showing us this morning is that when it comes to your work, that's a dead end in terms of where to fix your eyes. Instead, he is speaking there of the way that that's a danger to us. That we can run after all of the things around us to fix our eyes on others and to seek to bring them pleasure and instead miss what God has designed for us to do which is to fix our eyes somewhere else entirely. And so if you have your Bible, hold your spot here, and slide over to the book of Galatians. Because we need to ask ourselves this morning, from chapter 1, where is Paul calling us to fix our eyes? If we don't want to fix our eyes on that earthly master, if we don't want to fix our eyes on pleasing others, where should we fix those eyes? You're going to see the answer in Galatians 1:10. Do you see what he says?

<sup>10</sup>For am I now seeking the approval of man or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

So Paul speaks here and says, "We should be fixing our eyes on others. We should be fixing our eyes on God." That He is the one we are seeking to please through our labors. That we should not be seeking to please people, but to please our heavenly Master. And I want you to know, as I'm starting in the first month in this role, I'm committing to you not to be a people-pleasing pastor. That can be a real temptation in a role like this. That I can show up each Sunday and I can lead our team to figure out what would make you happy. What would satisfy you? What would keep the problems away from me? What would make ministry easy? But Galatians 1:10 isn't calling us to the easy path. It isn't calling us to the path of pleasing others; it's calling us to the path of pleasing God. And I want you to know from the very beginning, I will do whatever it takes as your leader to seek the approval of God and not the approval of men. And I hope that you walk with me in that journey and whatever vocation that the Lord has called us to. Because what Paul is showing us here is that when it comes to work, God cares about where we fix our

eyes. But that's not all that's happening here. If you look on at verse 7, we see a second focus this morning. We see the kingdom must be at work in our hands. Do you see the way it's written there in verse 7? Look back at it. He says,

<sup>7</sup>rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

So Paul's not just speaking here of where we fix our eyes, but what we do with our hands. And, you know, my old role, I was living in Nashville, but our, we had both offices in Nashville and Washington D.C. as we were seeking to shape public policy from a Christian standpoint. And so I can't count how many times I did that flight from Nashville to D.C. and if you were flying into Reagan and the winds were blowing just right so that they use a certain runway, you could count on it, every time that you came into the city at the last minute you would bank, turning to the right in order to land on that runway. And if you were sitting along the window on that right side as that plane tilted, you would have a bird's eye view of Arlington National Cemetery. And you would be there seeing the place where we recognize those who have given their lives for the sake of serving their country. They have rendered service to the point of sacrifice for the sake of a greater good. And that means especially a lot to us on a weekend like this. Where were commemorating Memorial Day and we remember the fallen who have purchased our freedom. When Paul speaks here in verse 7 of rendering service, it's a similar picture. In the same way a soldier renders service for the sake of his country, for a greater good to accomplish a mission even to the point of great sacrifice. That's the picture Paul's giving us. That when he speaks there of rendering service, that we should be those who are willing to sacrifice it all in order to achieve the mission that God has laid out for us; even in our work. He is talking about the work of our hands. What we do when we are in our labors. And he says that we should render service with a good will. Do you see it back there in verse 7? The term good will and I imagine if you're one of those slaves gathered together to hear this letter in the Ephesian church, and Paul has caught your attention. He is calling you to respond to your earthly master with good will. That had to be a difficult word to hear. Why? Because the natural tendency of a slave towards a master would not be to have a heart and attitude of good will, but that of resentment. This one is against me. He oppresses me. He makes my life more difficult. There is no joy to this. But Paul says, for the Christian who has been rescued by the gospel, God changes not just our hearts, but the way that finds its expression in our hands. That we should render service with good will. And that's a word not just to those slaves in that time period, but to us. Because that same pull towards resentment can capture our heart today. When you're passed over for that promotion. When someone that joined the company years after you advances past you. When you're the one put on furlough and they're not. When you don't get the call back after you submit your resume for that second interview. Those seeds of resentment can take root in your heart. Resentment is a fertile ground for a bitterness and a sinfulness that dishonors God. And you can imagine that would have potentially gripped the hearts of every one of those servants that is listening. But Paul calls us to a different way. That our lives in the workplace should not be driven by resentment, but by a heart of good will. See the heart of resentment sees yourself in the best light of your intentions towards others but is prone to see them in the worst light of the biggest slights that they do to you. But Paul is giving us a different picture here. That we should be rendering service with good will. Why? You see it right there at the end of verse 7. Because we're doing it as unto the Lord and not to man. Paul says the way to conquer the resentment that could be in your heart is to remember who you're working for. It's not the boss that makes you miserable. It's not the coworker that's talking behind your back. It's not your parents who

you're still trying to impress by greater accomplishments on your resume. It's the Lord. He is the one we are seeking to please with the works of our hands. He is the primary audience that we are called to honor with our work. Which may have everything to do with the next decision that you make for a new job in the seasons ahead. Just imagine with me what it could look like to follow the way Paul is laying out for us here to fix our hands in a way that pleases God with the way that you might choose your next vocation. Your next career calling. So in our world, in the American dream, what you're intended and expected to do is you find the best opportunity that will advance your professional life and then you ask yourself, "How can I fit my personal and spiritual and family life into that?" What if instead we followed the pattern of rendering service with good will that Paul is laying out here. Where the next job decision you make is not on the basis of your professional life, but on the basis of your spiritual life. And you ask yourself the question, "How can I fit my professional life into creating an environment for myself and for my family to flourish?" That's the type of picture that Paul is laying out here when he speaks of the kingdom at work and our hands as one that is rendering service unto God with a good will. But I want you to notice the way that this verse finishes in verses 8 and 9.

We see a third thing that Paul is calling us to here. He shows us the way that the kingdom must be at work in your mind. Look back at these verses with me. Paul says here in verse 8 he says this,

<sup>8</sup>knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. <sup>9</sup>Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him.

So right here in verses 8 and 9, it's bookended by Paul using the phrase knowing. He's speaking of the mind. How the kingdom is at work in our minds as we do our job. And as he spells this out here, he's giving one thing for slaves to know and another thing for masters to know. You'll see what he speaks to slaves right there in verse 8. He tells them that slaves should set their minds on the reality that they will receive a future reward even if they're treated unfairly in this life. Do you see the way he talks about there? He says, "Whatever good anyone does, the good things that you carry out as you are working." And this again might have caught those slaves off guard because they're not thinking about the good things they do. They're thinking about the bare minimum they have to carry out in order to satisfy their master and to stay out of trouble. But he talks there about the good things that are done. What does he say happens in verse 8? You will receive back from the Lord. Well these slaves would have worked in a setting in which they never were promised to get anything back from a master. There was no guarantee that just because they did good things, that they would be seen and rewarded. And yet, what does Paul say here? He says that's exactly what's going to happen. That your heavenly Father will reward you. There's this guarantee, this promise, this certainty, that one day is coming. That even if you are treated wrongly in this life, even in the workplace, you are treated unfairly, there is coming a day where God will make all things right. And you will receive the reward of a greater inheritance than anything an earthly master could promise or deliver to you. And that should remind us about how we should walk in the workplace with one of the biggest challenges every one of us faces. Which is the temptation to see unfairness in the job. Where somebody else is treated in a different set of rules than you. Where they are governed by a different set of principles than you that might hold you back. Where they get benefits that you do not and you

see that injustice. You see that inequity. These slaves certainly would have experienced that. And the temptation can be to say, "That's not right and it must be fixed in this life." But Paul doesn't make that promise. He never promises you a pleasant job, a great boss, an easy work environment, and low stress. But what he does promise you is that if you walk faithfully in what the Lord is called you to in the workplace, that you will receive a heavenly reward. That's what he wants these slaves to know. That is what he is speaking to their minds. But he comes right behind that in verse 9 and gives a word to masters. And what he says to them is that masters need to set their minds on the reality that they will receive a future judgment whether they treat those around them fairly or not. So the slave's promised a future reward. The master is promised a future judgement. Do you see the way he talks about it there? He tells masters to do the same. Think about how he is turning the ancient world upside down here. In no other setting would a slave be an example to their masters. And yet isn't that what Paul is saying here? He says, "Do the same as them." And in that action, in that command, he is saying, "Follow the example of your slaves." Unheard of. Nobody could imagine that. And yet he is saying, look to them. And when you look to them, when you follow the instructions that I've just given them, one of the things that that will result in is that you will stop your threatening. That you will change the way you lead from one that is leadership through compulsion to leadership through motivation. That you will drive them. That you will inspire them, not through threats, not by compulsion, but through conviction will be the way that you should be driving your life there. And he gives them a reason why. He tells them it's because, in verse 9, you know that both their master and yours is in heaven. So even though you may not be equal on the jobsite, you all stand equal in the eyes of God. That He will judge the hearts of a slave just like a master. He will judge the hearts of an employee just like a supervisor. There is no difference as he says there at the end of verse 9, there is no partiality. There's no distinction. And think about it, a master was accustomed to partiality. This was part of the job. This was part of the perks. You get treated different than those that you, that are your slaves. And yet here before God, he is telling us there is no partiality. And what that should remind us of this morning, is one of the glorious gospel truths that Paul lays out right after this in the book of Philippians.

Slide over one book to Philippians chapter 2. And I want us to be reminded of what it means for God to have no partiality and for what God is calling us to exhibit in the workplace. Because in this familiar passage speaking of what Christ has done for us on the cross. If you look down in Philippians 2 in verse 7, here's what it says.

<sup>7</sup>that Jesus empties Himself by taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So Paul there, as he's talking about the beauty of the gospel, he's reminding us that Jesus is God. And yet He was willing to empty Himself to take on the form of humanity. But not just any humanity. Do you see it there in verse 7? It says, to become a servant. But in the original language, it's the same word as right here in Ephesians 6; that of a slave, of a bondservant. He's willing to become, take on flesh, become a slave to sin so that you and I might become a slave to righteousness. He is willing to pay the price for our sin so that through his death and resurrection, there can be made a way. And what we need to hear this morning, Central, is that there is no partiality with God. Just because you've earned favor with man in this life, doesn't guarantee you any favor with God in the next apart from Jesus Christ. He says, there is no

partiality here. That Jesus became a slave on earth that one day He might become your heavenly master through faith in Jesus. When we lived in Nashville, we lived right across the street from a man that worked for Nissan. And he was a supervisor in the plant for one of their largest American manufacturing plants to produce cars right there in the country. And I remember talking to him one day, get to know him, and I asked him about how the system works. And he said, "Well what I do as a supervisor is we spend most of our time up on a second level above the primary employees, those that are on the assembly lines. And that way we've got a bird's eye view. We can see them in action. We can recognize things at an earlier time point. We can see many of them at the same time. There's this sense of elevation for the sake of supervision. And that's part of the picture that Paul is drawing us to here this morning when he speaks of the way that God is our heavenly master. That He sees our work. He holds us accountable for our actions to reflect where we should be fixing our eyes. To reflect where we should be fixing our hands. And to reflect where we should be fixing our minds as we do our work. And the call of the gospel this morning to each one of us, whether slave or free as we see here in the text, is that the kingdom would be at work in our hearts and our jobs in a way that recognizes that we follow a heavenly master, not an earthly one, to live out the life that Christ has called us to in the workplace.

Will you close in prayer with me?

Father, as we come to You in this time, I'm reminded of the way that so often we feel that pull of resentment in our hearts. That we recognize the inequity, the unfairness, the hardship that we experience, we can feel sorry for ourselves, a root of bitterness can creep up in our hearts. And I ask you this morning, Lord, if there are those in this room where that root has taken heart, Lord, I pray that You would set them free from that. That they would see the way that You've set us free in Christ and delivered us from that captivity to bitterness, to resentment, to a lack of joy. And instead, Lord, I pray that we would follow after the picture that Paul lays for us here. To be the type of people who submit our hearts to You, our attitudes, our eyes, our hands, and our minds. So that in whatever endeavor our earthly labors take us, we will do it in a way that is pleasing to Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.