

COLOSSIANS

The Christian Employer

Colossians 4:1

Ephesians 6:9

INTRODUCTION

So often we may hear people say, “We are not to mix religion and business; church is one thing and business another. We should be kind and gracious to one another in church but don’t get in my way in business or I’ll run right over you.” This is the philosophy of the world not of Christ. Christianity views the Christian employer and business much differently than does the typical non-Christian.

The number one problem today among executives, managers, employers, and administrators is not money (capital) or promotion (marketing) but personnel. That is, getting the persons working under them to perform their very best and produce to the maximum. The goal of management is to get labor to function at its highest level; therefore, producing the maximum for the company or the business.

The Christian executive is not just to increase sales or expand the business, but his number one concern and responsibility is to be a representative of Jesus Christ and to promote the cause of Christ in the office or factory. His highest goal is to live and promote the gospel of Jesus Christ before his employees.

In Colossians 4:1 and Ephesians 6:9, we have the obligations of slave masters to their slaves, and the very same principles which apply to slave masters apply also to Christian employers, managers, executives and administrators of any kind. These principles deal with relationships with people, namely those who work under the employer.

HOW THE EMPLOYER IS TO TREAT THE EMPLOYEE (Eph. 6:9a, Col. 4:1)

Submissively

And masters, - This command is for Christian slave masters not for all slave masters. Those who know Christ as Savior and Lord are under obligation to treat slaves in a Christ like way. So too, Christian employers are obligated to treat their employees in a Christlike way.

It should be noted once again that the Bible never attacks slavery as an evil social institution. It was evil but Christ and the Apostles never frontally attack slavery because this would have meant more persecution for Christians. Their approach was to see men changed by Christ on the inside who in turn would affect society. Christ changes men’s hearts and then men affect the culture around them.

Treat your slaves in the same way. - In Ephesians 6:8 and Colossians 4:22-25, the Apostle Paul has told Christian slaves to obey their slave masters whether they be Christians or non-Christians, good or bad. Now Paul says to the slave masters, ***“Treat your slaves in the same way.”*** Christian slave masters are to be obedient and submissive, not to slaves but to Christ in the treatment of slaves. Now translated over into the work-a-day world of America this means that employers are to hear the suggestions of their employees. They are to listen, adjust their complaints and pay attention to what is wrong. They are to be sensitive to the needs of their employees and seek to change things whenever possible. This is how employers are to obey Christ and be submissive to Him.

As it would be a natural tendency for a Christian slave owner to show favoritism to Christian slaves because they are of the same Faith, so the Christian employer might show favoritism to a Christian employee. However, the Christian employer must treat saved and unsaved alike, showing no favoritism. In this way, the Christian employer has a positive testimony before all men. This is the Golden Rule applied into the life of the employer. Matthew 7:23 says, ***“So then whatever you desire that others would do to and for you, even so do you also to and for them, for this sums up the Law and the prophets.”***

Rightly

In Colossians 4:1, it says, ***“Masters provide your slaves with what is right...”*** Christian slave masters had the responsibility to treat all slaves, saved or unsaved in a right or just manner. So employers are to deal justly with their employees, saved or unsaved. A Christian employer is obligated to provide adequate salaries, good working conditions and fringe benefits to all their employees. Did you know that labor unions came into existence in our country because employers took advantage of their employees just so they could make a buck? Greed has driven many an employer to poor treatment of their help. There would be no need of unions, collectively bargaining or strikes if management would have treated labor fairly. During the height of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1800’s and the early 1900’s employers abused men, women and children because they were driven by greed. People were forced to work long hours, under horrible conditions, for little pay. It was not uncommon for children to work until they dropped dead. That is when anti-children labor laws were introduced into our society and culture. Employers were driven by the quest for money and power. It is still true today that some employees will exploit people at times for the “almighty dollar.” Because men are sinful, there is the tendency to take advantage of people to gain riches.

Does this mean that God is against a businessman or company making money or having money? Absolutely not! We not only live in a country where we can pursue gain but the Bible in principle supports a free enterprise system of economics. If a person is in business, he should work for a profit. He should make as much money as he can. However, a Christian employer is never to work out of greed. God does not care how much money we make or have as long as we

have made it honestly. The Bible tells the Christian not to let money or lust for things be a substitute for God. ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant not to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”*** (I Tim. 6:17-19).

The scriptures are very clear that those who have money are to share their money. ***“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”*** (Eph. 4:28). The primary purpose for a Christian to make money is that he may share it with others and support the work of the Lord. In fact, the biblical principle is the more we give the more we get back from God. ***“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”*** (II Cor. 9:10,11). Every Christian needs to clearly understand that it is impossible to out give God.

What the Apostle Paul is saying is that the Christian should make all the money he can but make it honestly, without exploiting others, without neglecting family, and when he makes it, give liberally to the cause of Christ.

Fairly

Colossians 4:1 also says that the slave masters are to treat slaves “fairly.” This actually can be translated “equally;” that is, with impartiality. The Christian employer is to treat men fairly regardless of color of skin, the church he belongs to, the religion he follows, or whether he is a personal friend. If an employer does not seek to treat all men fairly, he will soon introduce into his business contempt, disrespect and divisiveness.

There are some Christian employers who wrongly conclude that because they have hired all Christians in their company that Christians should sacrifice for the company, putting the companies needs above the employees’ needs. Often these employees work for peanuts, have few benefits and work long hours. The employer thinks the Christians should learn to trust God for their needs. Perhaps it never occurred to the employer that he should trust the Lord for his needs and do all he can to encourage excellent working conditions for his help.

Also Christian employers need to be men and women of integrity. They should not speak out of both sides of the mouth. They should not lie or steal. They should not be hypocrites and should live out their Christianity in a practical way.

Christian employers govern their own companies and they can and must run their businesses for Christ. They can promote the cause of Christ before saved and unsaved employees.

When I was a pastor in Roanoke, Va., there was a very fine Christian man who made a very fine attempt to run his business in a Christian manner. I once asked him why his company never went union. He said that he had determined always to pay his people at least \$.15 an hour above the union scale and to have better benefits and working conditions than the union demanded. Consequently, year after year his employees voted not to go union.

WHERE THE EMPLOYER MAY GO WRONG

In Ephesians 6:9 it says to slave masters, ***“Do not threaten them.”*** Masters were not to just motivate slaves by fear but by offering incentives as well. Christian employers are not just to use fear to motivate employees. If laborers have the sword of Damocles constantly hanging over them, if there is constant threat of being fired, if there is continual talk of cutting pay or cutting back hours, the motivation factor and job satisfaction of the employee will be very low. Fear creates resentment, bitterness, rebellion and burnout. Now this does not mean the employer can never fire or cut wages, but that is not the best way to motivate the employee.

Employees should be motivated by appreciation, by offering incentives and rewards for a job well done. Rather than threatening, a Christian employer should encourage. All men respond better to a positive approach rather than a negative one.

At this point it seems appropriate to encourage Christian executives. Quite often when an executive becomes a Christian, he does not know how to treat his employees. As a non-Christian, he may have been a driver, harsh, over-bearing, dictatorial and over-demanding of his employees. Now as a Christian he knows these things are wrong and so he goes to the other extreme. He becomes soft, wishie-washie, overly sweet and a generally nice guy, but his business goes to the dogs because he is neglecting strictness, aggressiveness and discipline which must be part of every good executive. A Christian executive must find the balance between being demanding but not too overbearing, strict but not harsh, disciplined but not a slave-driver. That is not easy to do but the Holy Spirit can teach him this delicate balance.

WHY THE EMPLOYER IS ACCOUNTABLE

The slave master must treat his slave right because it says, ***“Since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven.”*** Colossians 4:1 says, ***“Because you know you have a Master in heaven.”*** The Christian slave master has a Master in heaven to whom he will someday give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ on how he treated his slaves. The Christian employer has a Master who is watching his every act and will demand an account at the future Judgment Seat. ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*** (II Cor. 5:10). Every evil act, thought or motive against employees will be recorded in the mind of Christ and be brought up at that final judgment for Christians. Also every act of kindness, love and justice will be recorded.

God holds the Christian employer accountable to treat his employees as Christ would treat them. Ultimately the Christian employer is not responsible to man but to God for all that he does.

WHAT THE EMPLOYER CAN EXPECT FROM GOD

Ephesians 6:9 concludes by saying, *“and there is no favoritism with him.”* Employers have no pull with God. He does not treat the employer differently than the employee. He does not have a double standard. Christ will judge both without partiality.

God is not impressed by our bank accounts, our Cadillacs, our status in society or that others bow down to us or run errands for us because we are wealthy, powerful executives. In fact, God is totally unimpressed with these things. He is only concerned with our love for Christ and our Christian character. He will show no favoritism at the Judgement Seat of Christ! He will deal openly, honestly and justly with all Christians regardless of their social standing.

CONCLUSION

Saved

No Christian businessman can say, “This is my business and I will do what I like with it.” It is not his business. It is God’s business and he is accountable to God as to how he runs it and how he treats those who work for him. Therefore, the Christian businessman must say, “This is God’s business. He put me in charge of it. I am responsible to Him.”

On the official documents of the British Empire, four letters appear, “O.H.M.S.,” meaning “On His Majesty’s Service.” All Christian businessmen and women should stamp across their lives, “O.H.M.S.” In all they do, they are “On His Majesty’s Service.” They are serving the King of kings and Lord of lords in their lives. They serve Royalty.

Unsaved

There are many people in this world who say, “This is my life and I will do what I want with it.” If this is your attitude, I would like to remind you of some words of Christ. He said,

“Then he called his disciples and the crowds to come over and listen. ‘If any of you wants to be my follower,’ he told them, ‘you must put aside your own pleasures and shoulder your cross, and follow me closely. If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live.’”

And how does a man benefit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul in the process? For is anything worth more than his soul? And anyone who is ashamed of me and my message in these days of unbelief and sin, I, the Messiah, will be ashamed of him when I return in the glory of my Father, with the holy angels.”

In light of Christ’s words, can you really say, “This is my life and I will do what I want with it!” What Christ really desires to hear from us is, “Lord, you are my life and I will do with my life whatever you want me to do with it!”