

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

Ephesians 6:5, Proverbs 27:18

By Raymond White

We explore the Bible to learn how to have a right relationship with God, and also our family, and even our neighbors whoever that might be. But we seldom turn to the Bible for advice on how to have a right relationship with our employer or our employees.

Since so much of our happiness in this life depends on our livelihood (and it's foolish to think otherwise), then we probably should want to see if the Bible has anything to say about work relationships. I've heard the sentiment often enough: "On your death bed, will you wonder if you spent enough time at the office or with your family?" While I certainly understand and agree with that point, I do wonder if we take it a bit too far to the point where we think that job and career really don't matter. I think what's really the issue here is we sometimes use our spirituality (so-called) as an excuse for laziness.

I heard a pastor say, "Some Christians have their head so much in heaven that they are no earthly good." Taking that as a cue, I'll share some of what the Bible has to say about employment and see if the Bible requires us to be some earthly good after all.

Deuteronomy 22:8 When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thy house, if any man fall from thence.

This verse insists that when you are building a new house, that you provide the proper "battlement" (NIV: "parapet", NLT: "railing") around the flat roof so that people don't fall off. If you don't provide such safety, and someone does fall of and dies then you are judged a murderer because you didn't provide obvious precautions.

In a broader sense, this verse is demanding common sense and a concern for other people's safety. It doesn't take much to be observant and eliminate obvious hazards by providing railings around roofs, fences around pools, safety sockets, and so forth.

There is good reason for OSHA to exist. Employers really are responsible to maintain a safe work environment for their employees. In the nineteenth century, one of the most dangerous places for a woman to work was in a sewing shop. The inner moving parts of sewing machines were exposed (to save on costs) and women routinely injured their hands. This was so common that you could commonly tell a seamstress by her mangled hands. Finally common sense, and unions, prevailed and employers began providing their factories with covered machines.

Employers, particularly Christian employers, should be mindful of safety issues about the work environment. This is not so much an issue today because OSHA, and our courts, and our unions demand it. And that's really a good thing.

Job 31:13 If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contend with me :14 What then shall I do when God riseth up? And when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? :15 Did not he that made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?

If you are treating your employee unfairly and he has cause to grumble and you are not even listening to his grievance, God will hear him and take his side. After all, God made him as well as you.

This brings to mind the Dickens classic, “A Christmas Story” where Scrooge was so stingy that he wouldn’t even burn a fire in the fireplace to keep his bookkeeper warm as he worked, much less provide medical help for his son Tim.

Psalms 101:6 ...he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.

You can always teach a new employee the trade, but you cannot teach him integrity. Therefore, when you’re hiring, look for integrity first and ability second. For those who are seeking a job, that’s a good thing to remember. Above all else, what your prospective employer is looking for is honesty. And if you steal from your boss, or his customers, you needn’t be surprised when you get fired.

Proverbs 27:18 Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.

Your job is your livelihood. If you treat it well and it will treat you well. If you treat your job with a lack of enthusiasm, don’t be surprised that you don’t get a raise, don’t get promoted, and maybe get fired.

There’s a story of two friends who got jobs at the railroad. One was repeatedly promoted until he became the president of the company, the other was never promoted. When asked why the disparity, the lowly employee answered, “I reckon it’s because I worked for \$2 an hour and he worked for the railroad.”

Ecclesiastes 10:20 Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

This is about loyalty. This is not ethical advice so much as it is practical advice. It’s not advice to kiss-up, but it is advice to be loyal. Be loyal to your boss. I’d fire any disloyal employee, wouldn’t you? So, why would you bad-mouth the person whose signs your paycheck? Doesn’t make sense, and it is rightfully risky.

The movie Transformers starred Megan Fox. She was also in Transformers II. She was not in Transformers III. She was fired. Why? Because in an interview, she compared her director Michael Bay to Hitler. When Bay’s boss, Stephen Spielberg, heard of it, he had her fired. Well, duh!

Not long ago a story hit the news of a Coca Cola delivery driver was fired because he was seen purchasing and drinking a Pepsi from a vending machine. Again, duh! Maybe after being fired from Coke, he sought a job at Pepsi. I doubt that Pepsi would have him.

The point is simple. If you don’t appreciate your employer enough to be loyal, why should your employer appreciate you enough to keep you?

Jeremiah 22:13 *woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.*

There are some people who are always trying to get something for nothing, trying to trick workers into giving them labor and not paying them fairly or paying them at all. Employers have options about many things like for instance whether or not to provide health insurance. But there are no options about wages. Minimum wage laws and overtime requirements are mandated by law, and should be.

Malachi 3:5 *...I will be a swift witness against...those that oppress the hireling in his wages...*

We are living in better times when employees are protected by law against many different kind of abuse. In times past, an employee (a farm hand for instance) might work four days, get sick and not be able to show up on Friday, then get fired for his absence. That was abusive enough. But it often would happen that the employer wouldn't pay the sacked employee for the four days he *did* work because he didn't finish the week. That is criminal and an example of "oppressing the hireling in his wages."

Ephesians 6:5 *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters...:9 And ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening...*

Here are two rules: #1: The boss is always right. #2: If the boss is wrong, see rule number #1. I heard it said this way: On the job, you have one duty and only one duty. And that is to help you boss do his job. That's why he hired you.

And bosses, you have a balancing responsibility to manage a non-hostile work environment. Truth is, your people work better when they are not constantly harassed, so peace is not merely ethical, it is practical; that is, if you are trying to get real work done.

Colossians 3:22 *Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.*

Again the advice is that employees do as their employers instruct. But the advice reaches a bit deeper — employees are not to pretend to be doing their job when they are not, to look like ("eyeservice") they are working when they are not, to curry favor with flattery ("menpleasers", kiss-ups) while doing little actual work.

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

Fair pay for fair work. God has blessed you with your business, you should bless your employees in like manner.

1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

Employees should appreciate that they have a job at all and appreciate their boss for providing it. Simple gratitude and loyalty and honor not only will keep you employed but it reflects well on your Christianity. If you dishonor your boss, he may well question your religion. If you can't be respectful to your employer on whom your livelihood depends, you are probably not respectful of anyone else either, and is that what Christianity is about. That's a fair question. When you dishonor your boss, that causes him to dishonor your God.

When you honor your boss, we normally take that as treating him with the respect he deserves. But it may mean something else too. It may also mean that when you do your job well, that reflects well on your boss and he gets credit and honor from other people (*his* boss) because of your fine job. In that sense, honoring your boss means creating honor for him.