

Ephesians 6:5-9 "Whatever You Do In Life, Do It As Unto The Lord"

EPH 6:5-9 "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."

This is an interesting portion of Scripture because as Paul has been describing interpersonal relationships within the Body of Christ and within the family he has been giving God's instructions about how all of this works.

And so, when we come to this portion we must never think that this is only Paul's perspective on the subject. This is God's will, as Paul is inspired by the Holy Spirit, whose word this is. And so we must receive this instruction as coming from God Himself.

I guess this is where some people have a problem wanting to accept this as from God since slavery is not only *not condemned*, it is actually regarded as a part of the normal social structure of that day.

Now this is not to suggest that slavery was the ideal or that God condoned every practice of slavery, but it must be understood that slavery was not what we think of when we compare slavery in this country, for example, to what was taking place in the 1st century Roman empire. And so, to put this instruction into perspective we need to go back and look at what Paul was addressing when writing to these Ephesian Christians.

The one thing which is alike, when we compare slavery in this country of years gone by, and slavery in the Roman empire, is that it is "the ownership of one man by another man so that the former was viewed in most respects as property rather than as a person. It was a deeply rooted part of the economy of the ancient near east and of the Graeco-Roman world." (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Slave, slavery)

Slavery in the New Testament times was something that everybody accepted as being the norm. Paul, on one occasion, even told one slave, who escaped from his master, to go back to his master. You might remember the passage. It's found in the letter to Philemon.

PHM 1:10-16 "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, (Onesimus means useful) who became my son while I was in chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him - who is my very heart - back to you. 13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. 15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good - 16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord."

Paul did not want to deprive Philemon of the "property" which belonged to him and yet on the same note Paul is clearly teaching that a slave, like Onesimus, could better serve him as one who is regarded an equal in the Kingdom of Christ.

But, Paul is giving Philemon that option even though he is strongly encouraging Philemon to be merciful as a master, primarily because Onesimus was now a brother in Christ through the ministry of Paul. And so this is personal and he makes a personal request.

PHM 1:17-21 "So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back - not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask."

Again, Paul is not commanding Philemon to relinquish Onesimus as his slave, but rather he is putting it in the strongest terms that Onesimus's new status as a brother in the Lord and as one who is useful to Paul, should temper Philemon's attitude toward Onesimus.

We don't know why Onesimus fled from Philemon. But, we must not readily conclude it was because of any abuse. In fact, there

was relatively little abuse toward slaves in the first century in the Roman empire.

When reading ancient accounts of the times we learn that slaves in "Athens, Greece were indistinguishable in the streets from free men, and the familiarity of slaves toward their owners was a stock theme of comedy....

..... At Rome the great houses employed scores of slaves for sheer luxury. Their work was highly specialized and often largely effortless. In the case of public slaves, their status conferred a good deal of independence and respect. They performed all sorts of duties in the absence of a civil service, including even police services in some cases. Professions such as medicine or education were commonly filled by slaves." (The New Bible Dictionary, Slave)

Slavery is a very old practice and even God made provision for slaves in the Old Testament.

EXO 21:2-6 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. 3 If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. 4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free. 5 "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' 6 then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life."

There were a variety of reasons why people became slaves. Many were born into slavery as their parents were slaves. Others were captured as a result of being prisoners of war. Many slaves were purchased.

GEN 17:12-13 "For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner - those who are not your offspring. 13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant."

Joseph was a classic example of this as we see in GEN 37:28 "So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph

up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels (That is, about 8 ounces) of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt."

Some people actually sold themselves into slavery. They did this, in many instances, to escape poverty. You had a place to sleep, food on the table and steady work to support your family, who in many cases found themselves as part of the deal to be purchased.

Sometimes people found themselves owing someone money and if they didn't have it to pay back they were forced to sell their children or themselves into slavery until the debt was paid. It was similar for a convicted thief. If a thief couldn't make restitution to pay his fines and damages he would find himself being sold to cover the costs.

Another way in which people found themselves as slaves was through abduction, as was the case of Joseph. In many countries this was not lawful and in fact it "was punishable by death in the laws of both Hammurabi and Moses." (TNBD, slaves)

EXO 21:16 "Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death."

Many slaves actually found themselves being apprentices in their master's business. After all slavery was an economic necessity for most people who could afford slaves. It was cheap labor, but it would have been unprofitable in those cases to abuse your labor since it effected the output of your slave. And so, it was to the advantage of the master to take good care of his slave in those cases.

During the first century most slaves in the Roman empire had the ability to buy back their freedom at some time. And what history reveals is that many slaves who bought their freedom were able to do so because they earned enough money from their masters to do so. They then went out, after learning their master's trade, and went into business for themselves.

An inscription found at Rome illustrates the practice of the time..... There was a street of shops in Rome called the Sacra Via, which specialized in jewelry. "All the owners of the shops who could be identified were [former slaves]. There were seven pearl merchants, two jewelers, two goldsmiths, one engraver, and one maker of silverplate.....

..... The patron of M.Canuleius Zosimus set up a memorial plaque to his freedman who died at 28 years of age. He said of him, "he excelled in carving Clodian ware. (CIL 6.9222) There were two firms of bricklayers at Rome. These were headed by G. Domitius Trophimus and C. Calpetanus Favor, both of whom were freedmen with slaves working under them." (TNBD, slaves)

Slavery was seen as a necessary part of the society in those days. "The living conditions of many slaves were better than those of free men who often slept in the streets of the city or lived in very cheap rooms. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the slaves lived within the confines of their master's house. They usually lived on the top floor of their owner's city house or country villa.(Cil. Phil. 2. 67; Colum. Rust. 1. 63).....

..... At Pompeii in one villa, the Casa del Menandro, separate quarters for slaves were provided on one side of the building. These rooms were on the second floor, included a kitchen and a latrine, and were connected to the rest of the house by a long corridor (Maiuri, Casa del Menandro 1. 186-188)." (TZPEOTB, slavery, slaves)

The point to all of this is that slavery was often a convenient employer-employee arrangement. It was restrictive and it denied many rights to slaves, but it was never intended to simply put people down and provide a way to abuse a segment of the society.

This doesn't mean that slaves were not abused, it just means that society provided a mechanism to employ people in a slave/master relationship and to use slaves to further their own lives. But, society also provided most slaves to get out of the system to go out on their own.

And so, when we come to our text this morning hopefully we can get a little better flavor for what Paul is addressing.

EPH 6:5-9 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."

Again, Paul assumes that people accept the practice of slavery in those days and that even Christians, many of whom were slaves themselves, must live in that society within the legal boundaries set by the government.

But Paul is not as interested in the legal aspects as much as he is interested in the spiritual ramifications of being a slave for Christ. Notice that Paul qualifies what types of masters these slaves belong to. He uses the Greek word *kurios* which is the exact same word used of Christ as being our master. But he says these particular masters are earthly.

In other words, they have authority and rule only in the context of this earth, which suggests that there is one who has a greater authority and rule when it comes to being our heavenly master. But none the less, Paul makes it quite clear that slaves must approach their duties to their masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart.

He's addressing the heart of the matter. And the heart of the matter has more to do with attitude than simply going through the motions. This is where 1st century slavery is similar to 20th century employment. Both are the norms for their times and cultures. But both must be approached in a way that brings honor to Christ.

Whether a slave was forced into that position, or an employee chooses the job he wants, work is still the issue. How do we show the "master" who is over us the love of Christ? How do we show them that we serve a higher master? We do it by accomplishing our work in a way where we are not seen as lazy or unproductive.

In fact, the way in which we work is usually determined by the way we think about our employer. If we deem them as unfair or harsh we will usually reciprocate with work that is less than dynamic. If we deem them as being a joy to work for then our work will usually demonstrate that.

What Paul is trying to convey here is that we need to look beyond our earthly masters or employers to our heavenly master who, in His providence, has us where we are to serve where we are.

This is why he says in EPH 6:5 "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, ***just as you would obey Christ.***"

Just as you would obey Christ? How would we do that? We would do that in any situation. We would do that in a way where we not only please Christ because we love Him, but we would do it in a way where we show the world that our true master is a God who loves us and is worthy of our obedience and loyalty.

But it would translate into work which is done heartily, where the time we are contracted for is fulfilled, and where we do the best job possible. And we do it whether they are watching or not, or appreciative or not, knowing that our true heavenly master is watching and does appreciate our obedience unto Him.

EPH 6:6 "Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart."

Paul equates submitting to earthly masters with doing the will of God. It is the will of God that we earn a living in this world through some form of work. But, even in work we have the ability and the privilege to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. But that witness will be hampered if we are not doing our work from the heart for Christ.

And the reason this attitude is essential is that most earthly masters, even the nice ones, will be hard to serve at times. We will be tempted to take advantage of them. And that's why Paul can say, "obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you..."

He's saying that that is the wrong attitude, because if that is our attitude, once they are not in eye-shot, we won't be serving the same way. Paul is saying God is always in eye-shot and He is the one we need to be pleasing, because in doing so God is glorified. He puts this same thought into perspective when writing to Timothy.

1TI 6:1-2 "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. 2 Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them."

EPH 6:7 "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,..."

Now, obviously Paul assumes we will be serving men, but again he's dealing with our hearts and our attitudes which are prompted from the heart. Paul understands that slaves in the first century were not going to be in ideal situations, but always being the evangelist he also understood that wherever we are in life we can use it as a ministry to reach out to the lost.

And there were many slaves whose masters were lost, just as there are many employers we serve who are lost and in need of a Savior. If they see us as just another person in need of a paycheck, who is no different from any other employee, how does that honor Christ? How do we stand out as one's who serve a higher Master which translates into being the best employee?

That doesn't mean trying to be teachers pet, or employers pet. And by that I mean just doing things to make an impression and getting on their good side. Employers as well as other employees will see right through that. I mean being the best employee simply by doing what is required of you and in many cases going the extra mile to do things maybe not required of you, but doing them cheerfully as unto the Lord.

Being to work on time. Not taking breaks every half hour. Not taking hour lunches when you only get half of that. Being pleasant to other employees and having a servant's heart to them as well as to your employer. Making sure the work you do is done right the first time. Not passing your work off to another employee, especially the new kid on the block who's been recently hired. Not taking things from your employer that don't belong to you.

There are a variety of ways to deal with other people in life and that's what Paul is addressing; real life, in a real life situation. And this is what God desires from all of us and that is to honor God in real life, not just in "religious" contexts. All of life is spiritual and is meant to be dealt with in a spiritual way as we rely on the Lord and seek to please Him.

I mean look at what Paul is saying in verses 5 through 7. Slaves, obey your earthly masters *just as you would obey Christ*.

6 Obey them ... *like slaves of Christ*,...

7 Serve wholeheartedly, *as if you were serving the Lord*,

Everything is put into the context of seeing that ultimately we are not serving men, but God. And as we serve God we know that it

not only pleases Him, but He is the One who blesses all who love and obey Him in Christ.

EPH 6:7-8 "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free."

Here Paul sums up that it doesn't matter if you're a slave or a free man. Every believer is obligated out of love for Christ to do the will of God, so as to please Him and bring Him glory as we represent Him faithfully before the world.

There is sort of a dual sense in doing good to receive rewards from the Lord. There is, on the one hand, doing good works out of gratitude for the free gift of eternal life we have in Christ knowing that those works, though they will never earn us eternal life, are certainly the result of our eternal life. And that eternal life is the reward for faith in Christ. The converse of that is true as well. Rejecting Christ has its own reward.

ROM 2:6-8 God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12) 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."

And so the reward we can expect in Christ is eternal fellowship with our God and Creator. What we do for Christ is important whether a slave or a master. In fact, Paul has a word for the masters as well.

EPH 6:9 "And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."

God is not a respecter of persons. Kings and slaves alike all fall into one of two categories. They are either redeemed by the blood of the lamb as they place their faith in Christ, or they will pay their own sin as they reject Christ.

1JO 5:10-13 "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have

life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

Masters or servants, all will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. But the point Paul is making is that until that time we must approach life as though we were serving Christ in every area of life.

But I can't help but think, if it's important enough for us to serve God faithfully at a job, how much more important is it to serve in the Body of Christ as those who bring the good news to the world and who then disciple those who come to faith as we obey the great commission given by Jesus Christ Himself.

It's all perspective as we consider the One who has given us life so that we might pass it along to others. And all of life is an opportunity to do this.

COL 3:23-24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."