

WORSHIP SERVICE - 6.18.2023

PART 17 - CONCERNING BONDSERVANTS

I. INTRODUCTION

1 Timothy 6:1-2

Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. 2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things.

II. UNDERSTANDING SLAVERY IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

- One of the most important things we have to understand when we approach the NT passages concerning servants and masters, is understanding slavery in the ancient Greco-Roman world and how it differs from the transatlantic slave trade we are familiar with.
- We wonder at times why the Bible doesn't explicitly call for the abolition of such an evil practice.

Slavery in the Old Testament

- There is no universal prohibition of slavery in the OT.
- Early in Genesis we see the mention of household slaves (Gen. 17).
- The Exodus account.
- Mosaic law included the humane treatment of slaves (Ex. 21).
- It also condemned man-stealing (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7).
- There was voluntary servitude for Israelites to pay off debts.
- Though protections were put in place, we do not see slavery considered or taught as part of God's created order.

Slavery in the New Testament

- Paul condemns enslavers, those who steal another man and force them into slavery. (1 Tim 1:9-11).
- Paul's letter to Philemon.
- Ephesians and Colossians both give exhortations to masters in the proper treatment of slaves.
- Paul implied in his letters the equality of slaves and masters (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:9).
- Paul addressed masters telling them to give what is just and fair to their slaves, at a time when justice for slaves was unheard of (Col. 4:1).
- Gal. 3 Paul writes that all are one in Christ such that there is neither slave nor free.

- The whole Western concept of slavery (the transatlantic slave trade), directly violated the law of God.
- You really can't read these passages and come away thinking that this is God's design for humanity.
- Though many twisted Scripture to support slavery, we reject that God's Word teaches full support of slavery.

Slavery in the Greco-Roman world

- By the time of Paul's letter, Roman law was such that it provided certain protections for slaves, improved the treatment of slaves, and provided a means by which they could eventually obtain their freedom.
- Almost 50 percent of Roman slaves were freed before the age of thirty.
- It is estimated that 1/3 of the population were in some type of servitude--50-60 million people.
- Slavery was intertwined with the economy of the Greco-Roman world.
- In the Roman world, people were in some servitude largely out of economic necessity.
- In most cases people entered into voluntary servitude to pay off debts, to learn a trade, and for their economic survival.
- Most slaves were members of a household, which afforded them some security.
- They enjoyed a certain level of freedom and social mobility.

- Many earned a living and worked in partnership with their owners.
 - Some held positions of authority within businesses and administrative posts in some levels of government.
 - They worked in all types of highly skilled occupations such as education and medicine.
 - There were even slaves who owned slaves themselves.
 - They could own property, they could invest and save to purchase their freedom.
- Kent Hughes in his commentary gives four reasons for why the apostolic writers did not outright attack slavery and call for its abolition.
 - 1) The positive reforms in regard to Roman slavery that were currently in effect.
 - 2) To attack the institution that was so essential to the Roman economy would have labeled Christianity as a subversive religion. Not to mention that the immediate demise of the institution would have reduced everyone to poverty.
 - 3) The spiritual reform brought about by the gospel was the primary preoccupation of the apostolic writers, it was not political or social reform. Transformed people will transform society.
 - 4) The radical message of equality that is explicit in the gospel would eventually bring about the demise of slavery.
 - Christianity, though not without its failures, faults and foibles, has done more to end slavery in developing nations, though there is still much more work to do.
 - There are more slaves today in the world than at any other time in human history.
 - It is estimated that there are over 50 million people trapped in some form of modern day slavery; human trafficking, forced labor, child labor. Over two-thirds are women and children. (<https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/>)

III. SERVITUDE TO UNBELIEVING MASTERS

- v1 Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.
 - Paul is writing to church members. He is writing to Christians.
 - The church consisted of both slaves and slave owners.
- Paul is directing these exhortations to “all who are under a yoke as bondservants...”
 - Paul is giving pastoral counsel to those who were under the yoke of servitude.
 - What does it mean to be under a yoke? A yoke was designed for animals. It was a crossbar that was placed over two animals so that they could pull together. That is what it meant for a slave to be yoked, they were bound to their master.
 - “Bondservants” - Greek word “doulos” can be translated as ‘servant’ or ‘bondservant’.
 - This is a term that Paul was very fond of using to refer to himself in his letters. He often refers to himself in his greetings as a slave of Christ Jesus (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1).
 - In both v1 and 2, the slaves Paul is instructing are clearly believers, they are Christians.
 - But a distinction is made between believing and unbelieving slave owners. The master in verse 1 is not a believer.
 - That’s why we have two separate sets of instructions based on the context for which the bondservant finds themselves in.
- They are to “regard their own masters as worthy of all honor...”
 - Even though they are not believers, they are still to be considered worthy of all honor.
 - The expectation is that a believing bondservant will treat their masters with respect and honor because they consider them to be worthy of respect and honor.
 - Slaves are to honor them irrespective of work conditions or treatment.
 - ...so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.
 - There is an evangelistic emphasis as to why believing slaves should show honor to their masters.
 - What kind of witness would a believing bondservant be to their master? A faithful witness of Christ and his gospel or a poor one?
 - If slaves show dishonor and disrespect their masters, they will bring reproach on the name of the Lord and the apostle’s teaching.
- Paul’s pastoral exhortation is a corrective against any Christian bondservant adopting an insubordinate attitude.
 - Although the slave / master relationship was difficult and challenging, they are to continue to live by the rules of slavery in the Greco-Roman world.
 - 1 Cor. 7:20-24 Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. 21 Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a

bondsman of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondsmen of men. 24 So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

- Being in Christ does not suddenly release them from their obligation, rather it ennobles it.
- Paul's concern was that the church's evangelistic mission would be hindered by disrespectful attitudes towards the social institutions and that the intention of the gospel would be misunderstood.
- Titus 2:9-10 Bondsmen are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.
- A Christian slave's witness either adorned the gospel or brought reproach upon the gospel.
- They could make the teaching about God more attractive by how they served or they could make it detractive through their disrespect.

IV. SERVITUDE TO BELIEVING MASTERS

- v2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.
- We can assume that it would be common for Christians slaves and their believing masters to be worshipping alongside each other in the same house church.
- No doubt there were some high relational tensions and conflict in the church at Ephesus.
- Some slaves who were Christian were adopting a twisted sort of reasoning that because their believing masters are now brothers, they could take advantage of them.
- Since Paul's reason for writing this letter was to instruct in the right conduct of believers in the church, these relational issues had to be addressed—the gospel was at stake.
- Paul writes that because masters are brothers in the Lord, they should NOT be shown less respect but more.
- Because they are believers and are dearly loved, they must serve them even better, because the ones benefiting from their service are brothers in Christ.
- What unites them in Christ is greater than whatever earthly entanglements they find themselves in.
- The eternal relationship bondsmen share with their masters should stimulate them to greater service.

What about the masters?

- Paul's writings to Timothy only address bondsmen, but he does address masters in his other letters.
- There were serious implications for how masters were to treat their slaves.
- Ephesians 6:9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.
- Colossians 4:1 Masters, treat your bondsmen justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK

- Few Christians take into account how important their witness is in the workplace.
- We spend the better part of our waking hours and our lives at work.
- We come into contact with many unbelievers at our place of work.
- That's why most gospel sharing happens where you work.
- Your work is your mission field!
- Paul's instruction for how slaves are to work and respect their masters regardless of how they are treated is important for us.
- There is no place in the Christian employee's life for insubordination, whether subtle or outright toward his or her employer.
- Every boss deserves a full day's work from every employee that professes to know Christ.
- The work ethic of the Christian should be the standard in every company.
- We are working to please our Lord, not our earthly bosses (Col. 3:23).
- When it comes to showing honor to your employer, boss, supervisor, director, the Bible does not grant any exceptions for bad or difficult work situations.
- 1 Peter 2:18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.
- These commands were given to slaves, how much more do they apply to those who are free workers in the marketplace.
- Respect is something every Christian worker owes their boss, even in the very worst working environments.
- At the heart of the matter is the respect we should have for authority.

- The workplace is servitude.
 - Your attitude should be to serve those you are under with a heart for their success.
 - In everything you display at work, your demeanor, your dress, your speech, your conduct, your interactions with your superiors, your treatment of co-workers, clients and customers, should display a desire for the success of the place for which you trade your time and skills for a paycheck.
 - Because ultimately you serve Christ!
- If you profess to follow Christ, you should honor your employer so that they can see the glory of God on display and the transforming power of the gospel being fleshed out.
 - Everything you do at work is a representation of your God and what you believe about God.
 - So work hard, work diligently, work productively, because you are working unto the Lord.
 - Everything you do is to be done to the glory of God.
- Do these things characterize your life at work?
 - Do you work wholeheartedly as unto the Lord?
 - Does your work adorn the gospel of our Lord and Savior?
 - What would your co-workers or your manager say about your gospel witness?
 - Are you the kind of employee that a company can't do without?
 - Or are you the kind of employee a company would gladly do without?
- Our attitude and disposition of servanthood makes us like Christ.
 - The gospel reveals to us the awesome truth that our Master became our servant.
 - Christ took the form of a slave.
 - His example of service - washing the feet of his disciples. (John 13:4-5; Mark 10:4-5).
 - We see the ultimate act of servanthood displayed at the cross.
 - Because our Master became our servant to secure our salvation we in turn gladly become his slaves.
- The beautiful reality is that Christ continues to serve us even now.
 - He provides us with the strength we need to serve him on a daily basis.
 - He provides us with the wisdom we need to be excellent at our jobs.
 - He serves us by securing our salvation such that those who are truly his will cross the finish line!
 - He serves us in every way possible so that we can be productive servants for the glory of God!

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?