

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 6:5-9, PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SUBMISSION (PART 3)

A. Perspective on slaves in the Roman Empire

1. It has been estimated that one-third of the population of the Roman Empire was slaves, around 60 million people.
2. William Murray, *Aristotle lays it down that there can never be friendship between master and slave, for master and slave have nothing in common; 'for a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.'* A slave was nothing better, and had no more rights, than a tool...Cato gives advice to a man taking over a farm. He must go over it and throw out everything that is past its work; and old slaves too must be thrown out on the scrap heap to starve. When a slave is ill it is sheer extravagance to issue him with normal rations. The old and sick slave is only a broken and inefficient tool.
3. John Stott, *Slaves were sometimes whipped, mutilated and imprisoned in chains, their teeth were knocked out, their eyes gouged out, they were even thrown to the wild beasts or crucified, and all this sometimes for the most trivial offences...It is immediately remarkable that ...Paul should address himself to slaves at all. The simple fact that he does so indicates that they were accepted members of the Christian community and that he regards them as responsible people to whom, as much as to their masters, he sends a moral appeal.*

B. A servant's responsibilities to his master (5-8)

1. Servants are to obey masters (5a), **Bondservants, obey your earthly masters**

a. Bondservant

- 1) It means *one completely controlled by someone.*
- 2) 1 Timothy 6:1, *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.*
- 3) A parallel passage is Colossians 3:22-24, verse 22, *Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.*

b. master

- 1) It means *owner, lord, one who owns property, including slaves.*
- 2) Galatians 4:1, *I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the **owner** of everything.*
- 3) Here and in Colossians 3:22, master is tied to *earthly.*
 - a) Paul is comparing one's responsibility to an earthly master to the Christian's heavenly master, Jesus Christ.
 - b) Obedience demonstrates submission to Christ.

c. Paul's position on slavery

- 1) 1 Corinthians 7:20-22, *Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 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 bondservant of Christ.*
- 2) Thomas Constable, *Note also that Paul did not argue for the abolition of slavery but urged Christians to behave as Christians within that social structure...Paul's view was this. It is more important for Christians to carry out our mission as Christians in whatever social conditions we find themselves than it is for us to make changing those conditions our primary concern.*
- 3) William Barclay, *He does not tell them to rebel; he tells them to be Christian where they are. The great message of Christianity to everyone is that it is where God has placed us that we must live out the Christian life. The circumstances may be all against us, but that only makes the challenge greater. Christianity does not offer us an escape from circumstances; it offers us the ability to conquer circumstances.*

d. The principles in this section may be applied to Christian employees in the workplace.

2. The ways a servant is to obey his master (5-7)

a. Respect (5b), **with fear,**

- 1) *Fear* carries the idea of *respect due one's position.*
- 2) 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.*

- b. Trembling (5c), ***and trembling,***
- 1) It carries the stronger emphasis on *fear*.
 - 2) One is accountable for his service not only to an earthly master but to the Lord.
 - 3) 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*
- c. Sincerity (5d), ***with a sincere heart,***
- 1) It means *purity of motive, right reasons, not hypocritical.*
 - 2) 2 Corinthians 11:3, *But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*
 - 3) Stephen Fowl, *...calling slaves to obey their "earthly masters" is not really the issue here. In this they had little choice. Rather, Paul focuses on the nature and quality of that obedience. Not surprisingly, this obedience is modeled on the type of obedience that believers display toward Christ.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *The best way to be a witness on the job is to do a good day's work.*
- d. As service to Christ (5e), ***as you would Christ,***
- 1) Sincerity is tied to one's view that service is to Christ.
 - 2) The human master represents the authority of Christ to whom the slave is ultimately serving.
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *This intrinsic motivation of serving the Lord with all their hearts enables slaves even in bad situations to continue to serve well.*
- e. Consistently (6a), ***not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers,***
- 1) *eye-service*
 - a) It means *to serve with a view to impressing others to attract attention, to call attention to oneself, not to please God or one's own conscience.*
 - b) Note Colossians 3:22, *Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.*
 - c) It is one who wants to look good only when the master is around.
 - d) J. Vernon McGee, *Eye-service is a word peculiar in the New Testament to the writings of Paul. He means, "Don't keep your eye on the clock. Keep your eye on Christ. He is the One whom you are serving." That is the way you ought to do your job.*
 - 2) *people-pleasers*
 - a) It means *to cause people to be pleased at the cost of principle, a time-server.*
 - b) It is one who wants to please men for personal gain and not to the glory of God.
 - c) Grant Osborne, *Believers are to please God, not people, and they are to serve superiors in the workplace for the glory of God rather than for personal advantage.*
- f. An inner motivation (6b-7), ***but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,***
- 1) All Christians are bondservants whether owned by a slave master or by Jesus Christ.
 - 2) The word translated *heart* is actually *soul*.
 - a) It is the seat of feelings and emotions.
 - b) It is a psychological faculty concerning the inner self.
 - 3) A Christian's ultimate motivation is to please Christ by doing the will of God by choice.
 - a) A job done for the Lord will please a human employer because doing a good job is the will of God.
 - b) William Barclay, *He tells the slaves that work must be done well not only when the overseer's eye is on them; it must be done in the awareness that God's eye is on them. Every single piece of work a Christian produces must be good enough to show to God.*
 - c) Warren Wiersbe, *Christianity knows nothing of sacred and secular. A Christian can perform any good work as a ministry to Christ, to the glory of God. For this reason, the worker must do his job "from the heart," since he is serving Christ and doing the will of God. There were tasks assigned to these slaves that they detested, but they were to perform them just the same, so long as they were not disobeying the will of God.*

3. The reason for faithful service is a promise of heavenly payment (8), **knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.**

a. *receive back*

- 1) It means *to get for oneself, receive a recompense, paid back.*
- 2) 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*
- 3) Colossians 3:25, *For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

b. The Lord sees and cares about the work a Christian does and he will be rewarded.

- 1) The promise is for slaves as well as free.
- 2) Stephen Fowl, *This promise reminds slaves that even if their work does not catch the eye of their owners, it is seen by Christ, and they will be compensated at some future point.*

c. Paul made no exceptions for proper service, 1 Peter 2:18-25, *Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness...*

C. A master's responsibilities to his servants (9)

1. They are to treat servants in the same God-honoring way (9a), **Masters, do the same to them,**

a. *do the same to them*

- 1) It is an application of the golden rule, *do unto others as you would have them to do unto you.*
- 2) John Stott, *However masters hope their slaves will behave towards them, they must behave towards their slaves in the same way. Paul admits no privileged superiority in the masters, as if they could themselves dispense with the very courtesies they expect to be shown.*
- 3) Thomas Constable, *Masters should seek to please the Lord in their dealings with their slaves even as slaves should try to please Christ as they serve their masters.*

b. Illustration of Boaz in the Book of Ruth

- 1) He was sensitive to the needs of his workers and generous to strangers.
- 2) Ruth 2:4, *And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you."*
- 3) Max Anders, *God is in heaven, where both master and slave are of equal importance to him.*

2. They are to stop threatening their servants (9b), **and stop your threatening,**

a. *threatening means warning of coming punishment.*

b. It is leveraging one's higher position to control the person in the lower position.

c. Leviticus 25:43, *You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.*

d. John Stott, *As parents are not to provoke their children, so masters are not to threaten their slaves. That is, they are not to misuse their position of authority by issuing threats of punishment...threats are a weapon which the powerful wield over the powerless.*

e. Warren Wiersbe, *Roman masters had the power and lawful authority to kill a slave who was rebellious, though few of them did so. Slaves cost too much money to destroy them. Paul suggested that the Christian master has a better way to encourage obedience and service than threats of punishment...Far better was the positive motivation of "that which is just and equal" (Col. 4:1). Let a man share the results of his labor and he will work better and harder.*

f. Colossians 4:1, *Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

3. The reason is because they have a Master in heaven (9c), **knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.**

a. A human master has the same heavenly Master as the slave.

b. God is not partial but treats masters and slaves alike, Leon Morris, *This is a gentle reminder that earthly rank has no relevance in heaven.*

- c. Such truths are grounds for human masters to take care in how they treat those under their authority.
- d. Grant Osborne, *By extension, the principles Paul outlines in this passage apply to modern employment situations. Subordinates owe their bosses respect and obedience, and employers owe their workers justice and fairness. Too often in work relationships, there is a prevailing spirit of animosity and power politics. On both sides, such an attitude is a sin. God demands teamwork and mutual respect in the workplace.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Christians are to serve those in authority as if they were serving Christ.
- B. Those in authority are to treat those under them the way they would want to be treated.
- C. Masters and slaves are accountable to the same impartial God.