

The Church, God's Plan for This Age: Instructions to Slaves and Masters

Ephesians 6:5-9

January 31, 2021

Introduction:

1. Paul never gives a theological basis for slavery as he did with marriage; instead he helps believers understand what it means to live as a Christian within this institution.
2. Over one-third of the population of Rome in the first century was slaves.
3. Slavery in Rome was different from slavery in the Antebellum south.
 - a. Racial factors played no role. Roman slaves were of virtually every race of people from every country. The most common source of slaves in Rome was prisoners of war.
 - b. Many slaves could reasonably expect to be emancipated during their lifetime. Most were released by age 30.
 - c. Many slaves worked in a variety of specialized and responsible positions. Many served as doctors, teachers, writers, accountants, agents, overseers, secretaries, and sea captains.
 - d. Many slaves received education and training in specialized skills. Roman masters viewed it as a wise investment to buy and train slaves and motivate them to a high quality of workmanship by offering them the opportunity to purchase their freedom through hard work.
 - e. Freed slaves became Roman citizens and developed a client relationship to their former masters.
4. Despite these differences, it still involved coercive ownership of another person. Slaves were bought and sold like animals, punished indiscriminately, sometimes violated sexually, compelled to labor for their masters profit, allowed no legal status, were permitted no legally sanctioned marriage or family bonds, could not keep their own children born to them while in slavery, and were not allowed to own property of any kind.

Paul casts a vision for how slaves and slave owners should live out their Christian lives within this difficult system.

1. Instructions to Christians Who Are Under Authority (5-8)
 - a. Obey your authority with an attitude of deep respect (5a).
 - i. Paul addresses slaves as free moral agents capable of thinking for themselves and acting with moral responsibility.
 - ii. The fact that he addresses slaves directly demonstrates that they were accepted members of the Christian community.
 - iii. Christian slaves were to obey out of deep respect and fear.
 - iv. Philippians 2:12 "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."
 - b. Obey your authority with singleness of heart (5b).
 - i. Obey without any kind of improper motivation.
 - ii. 1 Chronicles 29:17 "I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee."
 - c. Obey your authority not simply to make a good impression (6a).
 - i. How they behave when the master turns his back or leaves is just as important as when he is present.
 - ii. We are not to be people-pleasers.
 - d. Obey your authority as service to Christ (6b).
 - i. Remember that you belong to the greatest master of all, and all our service is ultimately for Him.
 - ii. We are the "servants of Christ" just as Paul often reminded us (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1).
 - iii. We are to serve from the heart.
 - iv. Deuteronomy 10:12 "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD with all thy heart and with all thy soul,"
 - e. Obey your authority with a great attitude (7).
 - i. In serving men we are serving Christ.
 - ii. This attitude not only glorifies God, but it put also transforms our perspective and our lives.

- f. Obey your authority with expectation of eternal reward (8).
 - i. All our good works are being noticed by the One who really cares and will be rewarded!
 - ii. 2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”
- 2. Instructions to Christians Who Are in Positions of Authority (9).
 - a. The same attitude traits that should characterize those under authority should also characterize those who are in positions of authority (9a).
 - i. Having an attitude of goodwill toward those under your authority (7)
 - ii. Wholeheartedly committing themselves to doing the will of God (6b)
 - iii. Recognizing that they are under the authority of an ultimate master, the Lord Jesus Christ (7)
 - b. Those in authority should not intimidate their subordinates (9b).
 - i. Threatening, intimidating language is not to be used among Christians.
 - ii. Intimidation is a poor discipleship tool.
 - c. Those in authority must remember that they will give account to their Master in Heaven.
 - i. God does not show His children preferential treatment based on our economic status and neither should we.
 - ii. Deuteronomy 10:17 “For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:”
 - iii. James 2:1 “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.”

Conclusion:

- 1. Are you honoring the Lord in the way you serve your superiors?
- 2. Are you honoring the Lord in the way you lead your subordinates?