

“Slaves”
Ephesians 6:5-9
(Preached at Trinity, January 3, 2016)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen since **Verse 21** of the previous chapter, the Gospel has a transforming effect upon every human relationship. We can see it most clearly demonstrated in the family. Paul has given instruction regarding the duty of husbands and wives and the profound effect the Gospel has upon marriage. In this chapter he gives instruction regarding the duty of children and parents.
2. Now he instructs slaves and masters. This may seem out of place in a section of Scripture that has dealt exclusively with the family. It would not have been strange at all in first century culture where slavery was common place. In fact, it was an important part of the family relationship. In the Roman culture there were often domestic slaves who were given responsibility for the care and training of the children.
Paul alludes to this in Galatians
Galatians 3:24-26 NAU - "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."
The word translated "tutor" is the Greek word παιδαγωγός which literally refers to a pedagogue or one given authority to train up the children.
3. Slavery is difficult for us to identify with, especially with today's attitude towards the 19th century South.
 - A. Slavery was very accepted in the 1st century
 1. Slaves were seen as necessary for an ordered society
 2. There were an estimated 60 million in the Roman empire - they probably formed the whole of the work force - free men did not labor
 3. Included among slaves were not only common laborers but also teachers, doctors, and other professional people. Many were actually better educated than their masters—yet they had no rights. They were merely the property of their owners existing solely for the comfort and convenience of the master.
 - B. The NT neither condemns or justifies slavery
It simply recognizes its existence - It focuses mostly on the proper behavior of slaves and masters rather than on the ethical issues of the institution itself.
1 Peter 2:18 NAU - "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable."

4. Paul's focus throughout this entire portion of this epistle is to stress the great change Christianity brings upon a person.
Eph. 4:1-2 NAU - "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love"
5. As we consider this passage on slaves and masters there are several important things we need to take to heart.
 - I. First of all, the NT doesn't place an emphasis upon this world's system
 - A. The NT does not command us to focus on political/economic/social conditions.
 1. In **Romans 13** Paul commands us to obey the civil authorities without giving any commentary regarding the wickedness of the Roman emperor
 2. The NT always directs our eyes beyond this present world
Colossians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."
 3. We must always be the salt and light in this world which means we often shine upon the darkness of this world. We want to serve faithfully in this world but we are not primarily of this world. This world and our condition in this world are not primary. God is primary - God is first, heaven is first.
 4. We can see this with Daniel. He served faithfully for the good of the Babylonian authorities, but his greatest interest was upon serving Yahweh. We never find him wailing against the Babylonian government. He lived and served faithfully in a pagan world, while maintaining his absolute allegiance to God.
 5. This is an important truth for many Christians in our generation
 - a. Many today give an unhealthy emphasis on politics as if a particular political party winning an election will solve the problems of this world.
 - b. Their passions are continually being raised over this issue or that issue.
 - c. We must never forget that we are citizens of another kingdom
John 18:36 NAU - "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."
 5. This doesn't mean we isolate ourselves from this world. It simply means we serve a master of a different realm. This is Paul's point here:
Ephesians 6:5 NAU - "be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh"
 We have earthly masters but our ultimate Master is Christ. We do all things with an eye upon Him.
 - B. The primary focus of the church is to evangelize and bring people to a knowledge of Christ not to reform the world
 1. This world cannot be reformed. Only the Gospel can transform lives. The ultimate solution will be the purging of this world

2. We are never taught in the NT to give our energy towards reforming this world. Rather we are to give ourselves to holiness.
2 Peter 3:10-14 NAU - "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,"
 3. We must always maintain a proper relationship to the world
 We must see life in this world as a temporary pilgrimage in which we give ourselves in service to Christ as we serve one another.
- C. We must submit ourselves to our earthly masters while recognizing we are servants of Christ.
1 Peter 2:13-16 NAU - "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵ For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. ¹⁶ Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God."
1. These instructions were given when the powers that be was none other than the cruel tyrant Nero
 2. They were simply commanded to submit
- II. The second thing we must understand from this passage is that Christianity does not dissolve existing relationships
- A. There was confusion here among the early Christians
1. Some thought that since God saved them they should leave their unbelieving spouses - Paul said NO! –
1 Corinthians 7:10-13 NAU - " But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away."
 Instead, Christianity transforms the relationship
1 Corinthians 7:14 NAU - "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy."

2. Christian children of unbelieving parents thought that they should abandon their parents - Paul says No!
Ephesians 6:1-3 NAS - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), ³ that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth."
Colossians 3:20 NAS - "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."
3. Slaves often resented their masters, especially their Christian masters retaining their position.
 - a. After all, aren't we all equal in Christ?
Galatians 3:28 NAS - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
 Paul says, NO! - Eph. 6:5;
 - b. Onesimus had fled his master Philemon - Paul sent him back and beseeched Philemon to receive him back
 - c. If freedom became a possibility, great! Otherwise, be content in the place Christ has placed you.
1 Corinthians 7:21 NAS - "Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that."
4. Paul's instruction regarding our particular situation of life for us to remain as we were.
1 Corinthians 7:17-20 NAS - " Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was any man called already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. ²⁰ Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called."
1 Corinthians 7:24 NAS - "Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called."

- B. Rather than abolishing our situation of life the Gospel transforms it
 1. Rather than abolishing slavery Christianity changes it - The slave is laced upon a new plane - he no longer focuses upon his condition
 2. In addition the master no longer treats him as mere property but as a brother

III. You might ask, what does all of this have to do with me? I'm not a slave. We must heed because it has to do with behavior and the effect of Christianity upon our behavior. Paul is speaking specifically to slaves but it applies in general to all who owe service to superiors

- A. First the negative - "not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers"
 1. God has placed many forms of authority on this earth. Each are ordained by God. Our duty is that of submission.

2. We obey not only when the master is watching. This has great application to the employee today
 - a. Arriving late or taking extended lunch breaks
 - b. Using company property as if it were our own
 - c. Doing the minimum amount of work - just enough to get by
 - d. It is not our time! - we must not use our employers time even to evangelize - We must give ourselves entirely to our employer
 3. This takes us back to the whole matter of being able to govern self
 - a. We have to continually oversee a child
 - b. An adult should be able to oversee himself
Someone should not have to watch you in order for you do what is right
 - c. A policeman should not have to set up radar
Romans 13:5 NAU - "Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake."
 3. Paul adds: "as men pleasers"
Verse 7 - "With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,"
 - a. This is an important lesson for every Christian
The non-Christian has his eye continually on self, on men
What do others think of me? Of my appearance, what I say
 - b. The Christian must not continually focus on what others think - Our driving ambition must not be to please men
 - c. We must not be driven by the praise of men
(particularly true for pastors)
- B. Now for the positive - **Verse 5** - "as unto Christ"
Verse 6 - "Doing the will of God from the heart"
Verse 7 - "With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men"
- It points to the ultimate focus of our service
- It is of interest that Christ is referred to in each of these verses. I've pointed out before that this entire section since 5:21 is Christ centered
1. The Christian life must be characterized by excellence
 2. We are to do everything as unto the Lord - as if we are doing it unto Christ - Never half-heartedly
It is a recognition of the gravity of our life in the gospel
 3. Our whole life should reflect Christ - In everything we do!

Conclusion:

1. It is essential that we realize that we are not our own. We have been bought with a price - Every Christian is a bond-servant of Christ - a slave
He must have preeminence in everything. All of our life must have a focus upon Him.
Our hearts are focused upon Him.
This is Paul's meaning in **Verse 5**
Ephesians 6:5 NAU - " in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ"
Ephesians 6:6 NAU - " doing the will of God from the heart."
2. Our greatest desire should be to serve our Master with excellence. Serving Christ with excellence demands that we submit to earthly masters He has placed over us.