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C0520 -- May 18, 2005 – Ephesians 6:5-9 – Slaves, Obey Your Masters

Let's review the context. The larger context begins in Eph 5:15 with the command to be careful how you walk, **not as unwise but as wise**. Wise people do not waste time but “buy up the time intensively” because they realize that they are living in an evil age (5:16) and that time is a creation and gift of God (Heb 11:3). It should therefore be used wisely and not wasted. Wise people are not foolish but seek to understand what the will of the Lord is both generally and specifically (5:17). Wise people do not get drunk with wine so that they are controlled by its influence but are filled by the Spirit so that they are controlled by the Spirit's influence in any and every circumstance (5:18). Therefore, a wise person is one who buys up the time intensively, constantly being filled by the Spirit so that they are able and willing to adjust their lives and plans to the will of God.

3 Applications to Being Filled By the Spirit. Paul then seeks to apply the filling of the Spirit to three basic areas of life (5:22-6:9); areas of life that all of us face; 1) marriage (5:22-33), 2) family (6:1-4), and 3) labor (6:5-9). These are the first three Divine Institutions given in Genesis. A Divine Institution is an absolute social structure instituted by God for the entire human race—believers and unbelievers. Whenever mankind fools with these areas of life by changing the God-ordained structure, trouble is waiting ahead. It simply can't be avoided. Marriage, family and labor are what God says they are and can't be re-defined by tyranny or majority vote. They are so fundamental that ignoring them will result in the collapse of a society no matter how powerful the military. See, a nation may have external power and force but the real issue is the internal condition of the hearts of men. The Roman Empire was, perhaps, the most powerful military force the world has ever known yet it fell, not because of military defeat but because of internal decay. Sure, they were defeated militarily by the northern peoples (Visigoths, et. al) but the real source of their decay was their internal heart condition; their total depravity.

First, we looked at Marriage, DI #2. Initially we looked at the wives responsibility as the submissive party. She is to submit to her husband. Ultimately she answers to the Lord for

this responsibility. If she rebels against this structure she is rebelling against the Lord. Next, the husbands have the authoritative role and responsibility of loving their wives as Christ loved the Church. Ultimately, he answers to the Lord. If he rebels against this structure he is rebelling against the Lord. Both wives and husbands must be filled by the Spirit as individuals in order to be able to fill their roles properly.

Second, we looked at Family, DI#3. Initially, we looked at the child's responsibility to obey his parents. Ultimately, the child answers to the Lord for this responsibility. If a child rebels against this structure he is rebelling against the Lord. Next, we looked at the father's responsibility to train and correct the child in the way he should go and not make him angry. Ultimately, the father, who is responsible for the whole family, answers to the Lord. If the father rebels against this structure he is rebelling against the Lord. Both children and parents must be filled by the Spirit individually in order to be able to fill their roles properly.

Third, this week we are going to look at Labor, DI#1. Initially, we will look at the submissive party, the slaves, who are to obey their masters. Ultimately, the slave answers to the Lord for his responsibility. If a slave rebels against this structure he is rebelling against the Lord. Next, we will look at the master, who has responsibilities toward his slaves. Ultimately, the master answers to the Lord for his responsibility. If a master rebels against this structure he is rebelling against the Lord. Both slaves and masters must be filled by the Spirit individually in order to be able to fill their roles properly.

I hope you are getting the picture here. Paul says it doesn't matter what the other person is doing. That is not the issue. The issue is what are you doing in that situation? Are you fulfilling your responsibility to the Lord? Are you being obedient to the Lord? If not you are sinning. Your response should never be conditioned on the other person's actions but on the commandments of God. Each one of us has responsibilities. It is not your job to fix everyone else. It's very easy to say, "Well, they're not doing what they are supposed to be doing so, I'm not obligated to them." "They're not submitting to me so I don't have to love them" and on and on. So many Christians have conditioned their response mechanisms on other people's behavior that they can't even see God's commandments clearly. It would not surprise me one bit if many Christians haven't been filled by the Spirit in decades. We have simply built in worldly response patterns as if so and so has an obligation to me. So and so doesn't have any obligation to you, so and so has an obligation to the Lord. We shouldn't be interested in human-centered obedience but God-centered obedience. If our obedience only externally resembles the real thing then it will never reach God's standard. Our obedience must reach past the world to heaven, where the ultimate authority sits on

high. This can only be accomplished by the Spirit Himself who controls our actions when we yield to Him. Today's passage is structures similar to the previous two

Structure

Responsibility of Slaves (6:5-8)

Responsibility of Masters (6:9)

As is Paul's custom, the submissive party is dealt with first and then the authoritative party follows. Also, there are more responsibilities for the slaves than for the masters. Let's read the passage:

Ephesians 6:5-9 ⁵ Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷ With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. ⁹ And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

We have to say a few words about "slavery" here because the situation in Paul's day is not familiar to you. The "slavery" of Paul's day was not the same as "slavery" was in America which I'll explain in a moment. For now, observe that Paul does not condemn slavery. Paul was not an abolitionist. Why not you may ask? Why was Paul not an abolitionist? Because Paul was more concerned about spiritual and eternal things. He taught that our present suffering was nothing in comparison to the joys of eternity (Rom 8:18-30). Second, Paul respected human government (Rom 13) and would not rebel against human government by trying to abolish slavery, particularly when it wasn't contrary to the word of God. We might say in conclusion to these thoughts: Christianity does not promise that our circumstances will be changed but it will give us the power to endure those circumstances. However, in 1 Cor 7 Paul instructs believers who are slaves to become free if they can (7:21) and believers who are not slaves to avoid becoming slaves (7:23).

Responsibilities of Slaves (6:5-8)

NPM 2 PPAImp prep ASF DPM prep GSM conj GSM

Greek Text 6:5 Oi` dou/loi (u`pakou,ete toi/j kata. sa,rka kuri,oij meta. fo,bou kai. tro,mou

prep DSF GSF GPF conj DSM
evn a` plo,thti th/j kardi,aj u`mw/n w`j tw/| Cristw/|

Translation 6:5 The slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling in straightness of your heart as to Christ,

Verse 5 begins with an imperative command **slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh**. Don't let this translation of the original confuse you. It is not saying that **slaves** should obey their masters in fleshly/sinful things. It could better be translated simply **slaves, obey your earthly masters**. The **masters according to the flesh** simply refers to their earthly masters in distinction from their heavenly Master. As I said before the **slave** system in Greece and Rome was not like the one in America. I'll give you four differences. *First*, the color of skin was not a factor. Slaves in Greece and Rome could be of any color. They just looked like any normal person who was not a slave. *Second*, a person could willingly sell themselves into slavery and be freed at a later time. It was a way of moving up the social ladder. *Third*, slaves in Greece and Rome could become highly trained and educated. Some became tutors and taught their masters children. Others became professors, physicians, and philosophers. *Fourth*, slaves could eventually be freed and restored as Roman citizens with full rights. I give these to you so you will understand the differences between American and Roman slavery so you will not read into the Ephesian situation the American idea of slavery.

However, there was a lot of discussion about treatment of slaves in Greece and Rome. Most took the position that slaves could be maltreated for even the slightest errors. Some took the position that if a slave was well taken care of they would work harder and be more productive. Ultimately it came down to the owner himself. The masters made up their own rules and did what was in their best interest.

It is important to reiterate that Paul is not an abolitionist. In fact, abolition of slavery is a modern phenomenon. The issue of the American Civil War really wasn't slavery anyway, it was states rights. The emphasis in the Bible has never been on changing the society so that it will change individuals (social gospel) but the transformation of individuals who will then in turn influence society (biblical gospel). That was Paul's emphasis and it should be ours. Therefore, this understanding of Roman slavery gives us the historical context behind the passage. Paul is concerned about this because some of the Ephesians are **slaves** and some are **masters**. Therefore he instructs them in their individual responsibilities. Our application will be to employees and employers.

slaves, obey your earthly masters. The word **obey** is *hupakouo* and is a present imperative. This means it is a command that is to be continually followed. This same word was used of Sarah obeying her husband (1 Pt 3:6) and children obeying their parents (Eph 6:1). It means “under...to listen” or simply “obey”. **slaves** are to do what their **masters** tell them just as wives and children are to do what their own husbands and parents tell them. Their obedience is for their own benefit (even if it doesn’t seem pragmatic).

The preposition **with** describes the attendant circumstances in which **slaves** are to **obey their masters**. They are to obey their masters **with fear and trembling**. The word **fear** is *phobos* and was used in 5:21 and 33. As we said there it means more than respect or reverence. A word like “apprehension” or “trepidation” without the connotation of evil best fits the way a slave is to **fear** his master. **Fear** was one way a **master** controlled slaves. Anyway, the point is that a **slave** should “tread lightly” around his master. He should be afraid because he knows who has authority and he should respect that authority. Second, he is to **obey his master with...trembling**. This word is almost always coupled with **fear**. It means just what it says, “shaking” or “trembling”. **trembling** is the outward manifestation of inner **fear**.

The phrase **in sincerity of heart** further describes the manner in which a **slave** should **obey his master**. The word **sincerity** is not a very good translation. The word is *haplotes* and literally means “to fold together”. It came to mean “straightforwardly, openly, frankly, not speaking with a hidden meaning”. When a **slave** speaks to or works for his **master** he should not have two intentions in what he is saying or doing. He should have a single, straightforward intention toward his master. His whole heart should be involved in his obedience and not just a half-hearted or external obedience. We are looking for an internal obedience, a straightforward, open employee who means what he says and says what he means. Otherwise he is crafty, cunning and malicious.

of your heart refers to the center of your person. In the most inner person you must be obedient. Paul is not just looking for external obedience, whether you get the job done. The flesh can accomplish that. Paul is interested in the inner attitude and willingness. Is it there or are you just working to get a paycheck and when your master turns his back are you goofing off? Many people pretend to work while actually stealing. Did you realize that goofing off is stealing from your employer? Stealing is condemned in **Ephesians 4:28**

²⁸ He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.

Remember the thief? The thief steals because he is too lazy to work. A laborer should work to exhaustion so that he is no longer a thief but a giver. There should be no goofing off or pretending to labor. As a Christian the way you work is a witness to your co-workers. If you're a poor worker then you are a poor witness. If you are a good worker then you are a good witness.

Paul closes this verse with the words **as to Christ**. This is a comparison. Slaves should obey their earthly masters as they would obey their heavenly master. In the same way that you obey Christ, obey your earthly master. When a slave is obedient to his earthly master he is being obedient to his heavenly Master. The two are inseparable. Just as when a wife submits to her husband she is submitting to Christ so this obedience by a slave to his earthly master is inseparable from obedience to Christ.

In concluding this verse we have this principle. External obedience is not enough. The flesh can produce that. True obedience comes from the center of your being where you have a right attitude and willingness to please the Lord. Only the Spirit can produce this.

Greek Text 6:6 mh. katV ovfqalmodouli,an w`j avnqrwpa, reskoi avllV w`j dou/loi Cristou/

PAPart NPM NSM GSM prep GSF
poiou/ntej to. qe, lhma tou/ qeou/ evk yuch/j(

Translation 6:6 not according to eye-service as men pleasers but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the soul,

In verse 6 Paul describes what the slaves obedience should not look like and what it should look like. First, what it should not look like. **not according to eye-service as men pleasers.** **eye service** refers to putting on a show to impress others. This kind of worker has the goal of doing all that must be done and leaving undone anything that his master won't notice. When his master is watching he appears very diligent but when his master turns his back he goes back to his fumbling. It also has reference to a worker who puts on an outward performance but he doesn't have any inner sense of obligation to his master or to Christ. The problem with this is that although the master may only see the outward labor Christ sees the inner person and He knows that they are inwardly rebellious. This kind of person only wants to impress people and get them to like him by doing the minimum amount of work. Christians are not to work this way. That's how unbelievers work, that's fleshly work.

Next comes the way we should work. **but (alla) as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart.** This is another comparison. We are to obey our masters **as if we are slaves of Christ doing the will of God.** This is the opposite of the eye-service of a men pleaser. The Christian slave realizes that his heavenly Master is Christ who can see the inner person and knows his inner attitude. And he works with that in mind. The last word here **heart** is *psuche* which is really the Greek word for “soul”. So the **slave of Christ does the will of God from the soul.** The **soul** refers to the whole man, both the material (body) and immaterial (spirit) parts of man. When a slave of Christ does the will of God from the soul his whole being is involved in the work. It is not just an external show but an inward desire and external action. This is Christian work governed by the Spirit of God.

prep GSF PAPart NPM conj DSM conj conj DPM

Greek Text 6:7 metV euvnoi,aj douleu,ontej w`j tw/| kuri,w| kai. ouvk avnqrw,poij(

Translation 6:7 with loyalty rendering service as to the Lord and not to men,

Verse 7 says **with good will render service as to the Lord and not to men.** This is amplifying what has already been said. The word **good will** should be translated “loyalty”. He should be **loyally rendering service as to the Lord and not to men.** Of course, the **slave** is carrying out the commands of the master but ultimately this kind of obedience reaches beyond the faulty human master and reaches the infallible heavenly Master. In obeying our earthly masters we are obeying our heavenly Master, Christ.

It is not uncommon for slaves or employees to build up resentment against their masters or employers. Many times employees lash out against them in destructive ways. I remember a few years ago when an employee got mad at his employer and went to work and started shooting his co-workers. Paul is reminding **slaves** here not to harbor resentment even if it is justified because ultimately they are obligated to the Lord and must trust him. Your ultimate obligation is not to people but to the Lord. Your conduct in every sphere of life is to be conduct that would please Him. If your labor pleases the Lord it will normally please men as a by-product.

PerfAPart NPM conj NSM conj proASN 2PPAImp ASN ASN 3SFMI prep

Greek Text 6:8 eivdo,tej o[ti e[kastoj eva,n ti poi,h,sh| avgago,n(tou/to komi,setai para.

GSM conj NSM conj adj NSM

kuri,ou ei;te dou/loj ei;te evleu,qerojÅ

Translation 6:8 knowing that whatever good each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

Verse 8 gives the reason. This is the motivation for working loyally as to the Lord. Now that we've looked at this verse you see that **whatever good each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free**. Doing good deeds goes far beyond church. Here we have it operating in the workplace. You don't just build up rewards if you're in full time Christian service or if you are at church every time the doors are open. What matters is that in every area of life you are operating under the filling of the Holy Spirit. Wherever you are whatever you are doing will be rewarded by the Lord. This means it doesn't matter whether your boss sees you working hard or not. Know that the Lord does see; He doesn't miss a thing. This should be a great motivation to obey our masters at all times. Of course, this presupposes the resurrection. If Christ is not resurrected then no one is watching and there will be no rewards. But this is precisely why Christianity is the only system that actually has a motivation to live a moral life. All founders of other religions are in the dust of the earth. They are not watching and certainly aren't rewarding! But since Christ is raised from the dust He sees all and knows all and rewards those who work by the Spirit. Only the risen Christ gives true moral impetus. We need resurrection if we are to have morality in the world. The two go hand in hand. We cannot simply force morality on the world. They must believe on the risen Christ if they are to be transformed and influence society. This verse is no doubt referring to the judgment seat of Christ, particularly when Paul says,

this he will receive back from the Lord. Our good works do not go to waste. The moment you do a good work that is not the end of it. This good will not go unnoticed or unrewarded. The resurrected Christ sees all. The words **he will receive back** are a future middle. Future tense because there is a definite point in the future when the judgment seat of Christ will take place (after the pre-trib Rapture and before the Marriage of the Lamb). The fact that it is middle voice signifies that you are the actor and the recipient of the action. You are going to get something **back from the Lord**. The **Lord** is the ultimate source and, as elsewhere in Ephesians, refers to Christ. Christ will be the one who issues rewards at the judgment seat.

Paul broadens the scope beyond just **slaves** when he says **whether slave or free**. In the future it will not matter where your place in society was (rich, poor, slave, free, male, female). What will really matter is your spiritual condition (Gal 3:28). Where are you in the Christian life? Are you producing no matter your station in life or are you failing? This should be a motivation to all believers not to be so concerned with social status in this life

but to focus on the hereafter which will last forever. Furthermore, a Christian's work is a witness to his faith in the midst of earthly trials and persecutions. But **whether slave or free** all good things done will be rewarded by the Lord.

Responsibilities of Masters (6:9)

PerfAPart NPM conj NSM conj proASN 2PPAImp ASN ASN 3SFMI prep
Greek Text 6:8 eivdo, tej o[ti e[kastoj eva, n ti poih, sh|
 avgaqo, n(tou/to komi, setai para.

GSM conj NSM conj adj NSM
 kuri, ou ei; te dou/loj ei; te evleu, qerojÅ

Translation 6:9 And the masters, do the same things to them, stop threatening them, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven and there is no partiality with Him.

Here Paul turns to the **masters** and commands them to **do the same things to them** (the slaves). What does Paul mean with this imperative command? He means that the **masters** are also to have an inner integrity, dedication and loyalty toward their slaves as to the Lord. Ultimately, all of us, no matter our station in life, are accountable to the Lord. The first thing the masters in Ephesus must change is the threats. The present active participle of **give up** really means **stop** and it is assumed that they are presently **threatening** their slaves in order to get more work out of them. They are to **stop this threatening** immediately. This **threatening** was the way unbelievers dealt with their slaves. Anyone can **threaten** slaves. Believers are not to deal with them this way but the Christian way. These **threats** are words that say "If you don't do this then I'm going to harm you!" In Paul's day the masters were often abusive. They would threaten them with beatings, sexual harassment of the females, and threats to send the males away so they could not see their loves ones. Paul is telling them to quit doing this.

However, what Paul is not doing is saying; "do not threaten them for any reason." For example, if a **slave** refused to work then it would not be wrong to threaten them. But it is likely that if a **master** treated his slaves properly this wouldn't even be an issue. But if it did it would not be wrong to threaten them. Nevertheless, the real issue here is that the **master** is to treat his slaves with goodwill and integrity just as the slaves are to behave toward their masters. Both parties are to operate from the heart and not merely for external appearances, putting on a show. Both parties are to be genuine and not double-tongued. Both parties are to be straightforward and sincere and they are to have a good attitude about it. Why?

Because God judges impartially. **knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.** Both slaves and masters all share the same **Master**, Jesus Christ. He is the Master of slaves and earthly masters. All answer to Him. He is located **in heaven** so that He holds higher ground and authority than any earthly master. Therefore, earthly masters should deal with their slaves in integrity since they too are accountable to their Master in heaven. Christ's location **in heaven** presupposes the resurrection. If Christ is not resurrected then earthly masters can treat their slaves however they want, no one is really watching anyway! But since Christ is resurrected and sits **in heaven** then He is watching every motive. Everyone ultimately answers to Him. This fact should drive us all to avoid external obedience and evaluate the inner motives of our hearts. External obedience can be produced by the flesh but internal obedience can only be produced by the Spirit.

Our ultimate **Master**, Jesus Christ, who sits **in heaven**, is not partial to anyone. This is expressing His justice. This word **partiality** literally means "I receive a face". It means judging on the basis of externals, appearance. For example, when a famous celebrity is pulled over by a policeman he may not receive a ticket because the officer recognizes his face. This, however, is not true of Christ. Christ is absolutely just and it doesn't matter if you are rich and famous or poor and infamous. There is no partiality with Christ no matter what your social status.

Review of Principles

Slaves

- **Obey masters**
- **Obey them externally**
- **Obey them internally**
- **Obeying earthly masters is obedience to Christ**
- **No fooling around at work**
- **Don't work to impress others**
- **Don't work to get people to like you**
- **Don't do everything that must be done & leave undone things that won't be noticed**
- **Work as to the Lord**
- **There should be inner and outer obedience b/c Christ sees all**
- **Be loyal to the Lord**
- **Why? b/c all good will be rewarded at judgment seat of Christ**

Masters

- **Don't threaten**
- **Be straightforward**
- **Have integrity**
- **Work as to the Lord**
- **There should be inner and outer obedience b/c Christ sees all**
- **Be loyal to the Lord**
- **Why? b/c all good will be rewarded at judgment seat of Christ**

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