

# Christian Servants

By Joel Wood

**Bible Text:** Titus 2:9-11

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We are still in Titus chapter 2 verses 9 through 15. Thank you for hearing Edgar last week and he welcomes your feedback. He was encouraged that there was no throwing of rotten tomatoes, and especially that there was no throwing of canned tomatoes, while he was preaching. And so please continue to encourage him, he has a great ministry already, even as a student under care, and so he covets your feedback and interaction on any ministry that he has among us, so please reach out to him, encourage him and work with him as he is studying and preparing, Lord willing, for full time work ministry at some point in future. You're a dear brother, Edgar, thank you for your work.

Titus chapter 2, we will be looking at verses 9 through 11, today. I'll read 9 through 15 just to prepare us and give the full context as we will dip into verse 11 just briefly. Hear the Word of the Lord. I'll be reading from the Modern English Version and preaching from it, as well. "Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to please them well in everything, not answering back, or stealing, but showing complete fidelity, so that they may exemplify the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, righteously, and in godliness in this present world, as we await the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for Himself a special people, zealous of good works. Teach these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." The grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God stands forever.

Today, I want to encourage you, brothers and sisters, to serve your ultimate Master. Serve your ultimate Master, holding faithfully to all He has taught you. We'll see four things in this text. We will see Christian dignity, we'll see a Christian dilemma, we will see Christian duty, and we will see Christian doctrine, again. That is a thread that is woven throughout Titus and all that is taught here. Firstly, Christian dignity. The fact that slaves are given exhortation, that is an amazing fact. It's something that so easily can just be read right over or to be caught up in other issues, but the fact that specific Christian instruction is given to this group, those who are in service to others due to debts, family situations, or other events, shows their dignity despite their lowly estate. This is not a shadow of slavery, this is not where the servant is the personal property. As we read in Scripture, a bondservant may have come close to that, but even a bondservant was one who'd been freed of his debts and obligations and he chose willing to pledge faithfulness to his master and that was usually marked by a piercing of the ear. And so a particular dignity that sees these folks as not just servants of their earthly masters but of THE Master. It shows that, in the church, that we should not so quickly set ourselves apart, those who are important in the world and those who are unimportant in the world. All of the braggadocio of the flesh and the worldly systems checks itself at the door. When we enter in we are all

servants of Christ. We are all ones who bow ultimately before Him and have an exhortation to receive. But let- let us not miss these two quick little words "exhort servants." It can so quickly be missed that here the lowliest of the culture and society found a place of dignity in the Gospel. That they had things to do, too, for the kingdom. That it wasn't just the powerful and the mighty and those who were well connected and those who were in the governor's mansion or- or those who are in the halls of Congress or those who are in the White House or- or we can think of all the parallels to our culture today. But even the lowliest servant had a role to fulfill for the kingdom in how they serve Christ.

Secondly, we see the Christian dilemma to serve Christ above all. What does Paul say here? "Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to please them well in everything..." This can be a dilemma. It can be a dilemma because we are pendulums in this life and we swing from one side to the other. We swing from that sense that "I must please my master. I've got to keep this job. I've- I've got to do this or that or the other, I am dependent on this, or they're such great people and they've been so good to me and I know this maybe isn't quite right but- but they've been good to me so I've got to be good to them." We swing to the other side: "Look how he treats me. Look how he responds to me. Why should I do this. He doesn't own me." This is a dilemma because we are frail and we live in the flesh and we can get distracted by shiny things and we can get discouraged by broken, dirty things. See, since these servants serve Christ above all, this determines for them how they will serve others. But it also determines the boundaries of their service because seeking to please their master in everything truly means in all things that are not displeasing to Christ. This sets boundaries for all of us. Ephesians 6:1 and 2, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." "In the Lord" being the operative phrase there. Many times, parents, we can be guilty of imposing things as if they are in the Lord when they aren't really. And when children's hearts begin to turn, then we get desperate for the purity of simply following after Christ. No, "children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." And- and as this command is expounded for us in the Larger Catechism, we come to understand that this isn't just about children and parents, that this is about superiors and inferiors and equals and the responsibilities we have toward one another in each of those roles and responsibilities. So bosses, don't require your employees, your servants, to do things that would violate God's command. If you're an employee, don't encourage another employee "just do it this once, it'll be okay, you got to keep this job." And if you're an employee interacting with your boss, don't think that because they require it and it goes against God's Word that you have to do it. Young people, as the ethics of our nation get squishier and squishier (that's a theological term), get looser and looser and more and more relative (so people think), remember that just because someone is over you in power or position does not require you to do as they say. I have a lot of banter now about what it means to be a faithful person, a patriotic person, what it means to- to be a good person. Don't fall for it. There are appropriate times to ask, "what would Jesus do?" Indeed, to ask, "what DID Jesus do?" Remember that Jesus followed ALL of God's law perfectly. And while we cannot, that does not give us an excuse to start bending the rules and to start getting squishy on our ethics. "Can I do this thing asked of me and love God and neighbor as I should? Can I fulfill this requirement for school or work or sport and uphold my Christian testimony?" These are the fundamental principles that should drive our ethics. And these are the ethics to which Paul, through Titus, is calling the servants who are members of First RP Crete. These- these are the things that should drive how we act. "Is this something that I can please my master but also please my ultimate Master in how I operate?" And for those of you who hold power and position over others in the work force, that's also the type of question you have to ask yourself. "Is how I'm leading these people, is the way in which I'm requiring the work to be done, are the things that I expect of my team, my employees, are these things that help me ultimately bring honor and glory to MY ultimate Master? Because I'm not just a master here, I'm also a servant there." That's our dilemma, not because it's something we should really have to weigh, it's a dilemma because we're in the flesh and we're weak and we get caught up in the moment and in the pressure and in the deadline and in all the things that swirl around us.

We see clearly then, thirdly, our Christian duty, our Christian duty. So we saw Christian dignity: slaves given exhortation. We saw Christian dilemma: serving Christ above all. And our Christian duty: serving with gusto. Serving with gusto. "Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to please them well in everything, not answering back, or stealing, but showing complete fidelity..." See, Paul nudges us beyond a mere trepidation that weighs "Oh, maybe I shouldn't do this because of my loyalty to Christ." It also defines how one SHOULD do and how it should be done, that anything called for that is not dishonoring to Christ should be done, can we say, enthusiastically, joyfully. Where do- where do we see this? Well first, we start to see it in just the collection of phraseology that Paul uses here. Where we- we see a- a wholeness of the person in words, in hands (which point to deeds), and in heart. Complete fidelity. These are-- these are things that- that mark how we live. When we send one of our kids into a social situation we might say, "Hey, watch your words. Careful what you do, careful what you say, okay?" Obviously that doesn't mean, oh, only those things, then there can be all these other things that- that you can get involved in. No, we're saying watch yourself, be circumspect in how you live and how you operate. And this is going further than that old-- that old rock and roll song "Yakety Yak (Don't Talk Back)." But Paul is addressing the specific temptation of that era, which I think can be a temptation in all eras, to speak one's mind when it just isn't, perhaps, right to do so. To submit in body, or part of the body, but not in mouth. We know when we send a child off to do a job and we-- "who are you talking to in there?" "Nobody." "Sure you're not talking to yourself? Maybe you should talk to the Lord." But it goes further than the mouth because what does the mouth speak? The mouth speaks the overflow of the heart. Watch this in yourself and in others in conversation. If they will say THAT on the outside, what must they think on the inside? That can be a scary question, even especially, of ourselves. "What, if I'll say that to that person, does that say about my heart?" Not just not answering back, but also this idea of stealing. As you look at its usage, it's- it's not so much pointing to a negative, like a taking, as much as it's pointing to the lack of a positive. Yes, there's obviously the- the connotation here in stealing of not taking, but it also holds the nuance of not giving. Not giving your all to the task at hand. Holding back from your best in the task while serving others. In Colossians 3, Paul states this and connects these dots a little bit different way, says it a little more plainly. [vs 22-25] "Servants, obey your masters in all things according to the flesh, serving not only when they are watching, as the servants of men, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. For you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will receive for the wrong which he has done, and there is no partiality." And so see, this isn't just talking about that ream of paper that makes its way into your car and home or the- the box of pens or whatever the-- think of the the corporate theft that- that has to be managed in companies, today. This is talking about the theft that- that happens when we're not serving our earthly masters as we would serve Jesus if He were in the room.

I spent one summer working at a steel plant in Findlay, Ohio. In a lot of ways it was the best job I ever had, it was diverse, it was fun for me, got to operate big equipment and all of that. But it was very interesting, stepping in to that culture. I was a student at the time at Moody Bible Institute, known as the West Point of Christian service. We'd have students come from Wheaton College-- maybe you've heard of Wheaton, known as a good school-- students would come from Wheaton and struggle with the academics at Moody. I was used to an intense culture and environment and then I went to work at this steel plant. The first load of steel comes for the summer and we start unhooking the bundles and moving them and there's the little chunks of 4x4 that were used to separate the orders and I immediately start stacking them off to the side and one of my superiors says, "Don't do that, don't do that." "Why not?" "Just put 'em wherever." "Why?" He says, "Always leave something undone, they won't fire you that way." "What? Wouldn't be quicker, wouldn't we be able to get more work done--?"

"Just leave it, just throw 'em wherever. Later, if we need something to do, we'll be able to come back and collect them." "Okay, that's interesting." Then one day I'm out on the floor and all the sudden somebody else-- "Yeah, it's 33 inches!" "Okay, yeah, 33!" The number 33 is still very, very special to me. And I pursued it[?] later, I said, "You know, I was-- I was working the shear over here and you guys were yelling '33.' 33 had nothing to do with the plans I had. What was 33 about?" They said, "Oh, 33 is the code word for the owner. When the owners on the floor, we yell '33' and everybody knows to get busy." "Oh! I WAS busy, I was so busy I didn't--" Well, not to set myself up as the standard, that's not what I mean. But I do mean this: are we serving our earthly masters as we would serve them if Jesus were there with us? That can be hard when our earthly masters look nothing like Jesus. But Paul says it more plainly and more fully in Colossians 3, "... but in singleness of heart--" that fidelity-- "fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance." Brothers and sisters, it's very freeing. It's very freeing in your work, in your career, to serve Christ above the earthly master.

Fourthly, Christian doctrine, Christian doctrine is shone forth in our service so that they may exemplify the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things. In all things. As from the beginning, Christian teaching leads to Christian living. That's what-- that's what Paul is instilling in Titus here as he takes them through the gallery of types of church members and says, "See these folks? Teach them this way. See these folks? Teach them that way. See this group over here? They need to learn this. See these folks? They need to understand this." Our Christian living is rooted in Christian doctrine and when we serve as we should, when we serve the Master who is coming again above the master who is right here, right now, the doctrine of God will shine. It will be exemplified. If we get short-sighted, if we start to obey men because they hold some particular earthly power or control or paycheck, if we do that and we forget about the Master who is coming back again for us, we will forget that, ultimately, we don't answer to that one we can see. We ultimately answer to the one who, right now, we can't see but we will see. As one of my mentors recently said, "Sometimes I think people forget that they will stand before the Lord one day to answer for what they do in this life." See, if we get short-sighted, brothers and sisters, we will forget. We will forget that. What a much better place for us to be, to be serving the ultimate Master through the earthly master. Titus 2 verse 1, "But as for you, teach what is fitting of sound doctrine," Paul begins this section. And here it's as if he's saying, "But as for you, servants, LIVE what is fitting of sound doctrine." Brothers and sisters, as we take the teaching that Paul has had for us in this chapter and we begin to live it out, we begin to exemplify the doctrine of God. One illustration in all of this is Joseph, a servant who did not ask to be a servant. Who served well despite the methods and motives of others. Who preferred jail to immorality. Who preferred forgiveness and provision to exacting revenge. And all of it showed forth the doctrine of God. Which-which doctrine was that? It's summarized in his statement: "you meant this for evil but God meant it for good." What was God doing in all of Joseph's life? He was fulfilling His Word from Genesis 15. See, it's as if Joseph were the firstborn among many brethren, he would go to Egypt, he would suffer, and then he would be raised to preeminence. Genesis 15, God promised Abraham, as soon as He gave him the land, (this is like one of those asterisk clauses, you say, "What does this say? What? You know.) here's your new home. Asterisk: you will be kicked out of your new home. What? That's what happened. Here's the land, you're gonna be kicked out of the land. You're gonna go to a different land, they're gonna like you at first, then they're not gonna like you. For four hundred years. This is not the news we like to receive. But this is what God was doing in Joseph's life. Joseph's life, in Joseph's service, was exemplifying the doctrine of the Providence of God, the faithfulness of God to fulfill His Word. And as we come to the table this morning, we'll talk briefly about another servant, but here we can bask in all that God did in Joseph's life and ask Him to do that in ours. If you're struggling in your place of work, if the demands seem too much or too immoral, too against God's law, read the life of Joseph and see what God did there in the life of a man who, by God's grace, followed after Him. I'm sure-- I'm sure Joseph had his

dark nights of the soul. I'm sure he laid on that-- I almost said "on the cot"-- but I'm sure he laid on the ground in his jail cell many nights thinking, "So God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life, huh?" Thinking, "Lord, what are do you doing in this?" He had lots of time to process the providence of God so that, by the time his brothers showed up, the light bulb had come on. You meant this for evil, God meant it for good. So we see the Christian dignity, the fact that this class of people, so to speak, was given exhortation from the same mouth of God's servants that was giving exhortation to the rich and wealthy and the older and the wise, he was giving exhortation to them, as well. We see the Christian dilemma that, brothers and sisters, we are called to serve Christ above all, that our service is ultimately to Him. And so therefore, Christian duty is to serve with gusto no matter where Christ has placed us, as long as we're able to do so in good conscience. And in doing so our life exemplifies the doctrine of God, we see Christian doctrine shown forth in our service. Brothers and sisters, serve your ultimate Master, Jesus Christ. He's coming again, He's coming again. And hold faithfully to all that He has taught you.

Stand with me as I pray.