

## Making sense of slavery in the Bible<sup>1</sup>

*How was it different from Slavery in the U.S.?*

- Slavery was not determined by the color of ones skin
- A free person could sell themselves into slavery and eventually gain their freedom. There was a time limit.
- Slaves could become highly trained and educated
- Slaves could eventually become free and in doing so Roman Citizens

*What was slavery like in Paul's time?*

- Slavery was wide spread and deeply ingrained in the broader culture
- Roman law officially recognized slaves as persons and there were those who advocated for better treatment of slaves
- In the end "a slave had virtually no protection under the law... no access to the courts and the death penalty awaited any slave who informed on his master."

*How do we comprehend the Paul's interaction with slavery?*

- First of all we must recognize that Paul does not officially address the institution of slavery
- Secondly we must recognize that at this point in history Christianity is not a dominant force.
- Third, it is likely that the majority of the church members in Ephesus are slaves themselves. What are they going to do?
- Although Paul doesn't outwardly condemn the practice of slavery it must be admitted that his teaching undermines it
- 1 Cor. 7:21 Paul tells slaves to gain their freedom if they have the opportunity
- 1 Cor. 7:23 Paul tells men to avoid selling themselves into slavery
- Phm Paul essentially requests Philemon to free Onesimus on the basis of Onesimus' usefulness to Paul for ministry and even more importantly their mutual brotherhood in Christ.
- While the OT allowed for slavery it consistently disallowed the sale of Israelites into slavery.

## Ephesians 6:5-9 Redeeming Authority

**If you are under authority you are called to obey that earthly authority - vv.5-8**

- The manner of our obedience is \_\_\_\_\_ and integrity
- The object of our obedience is \_\_\_\_\_
- The goal of our obedience is heavenly \_\_\_\_\_

**If you have authority you are called to obey your heavenly authority - v.9**

- We seek the \_\_\_\_\_ of those under us
- We remember that we are \_\_\_\_\_ in the sight of God

**The Principle:** *Instead of asserting our rights we are to focus on fulfilling our duties to one another.*

**Big Idea:** *Since Christ has saved us we can pursue his glory in everything we do even our obedience to authority and the wielding of our own authority over others.*

**Bringing it home:**

- What difference would this kind of thinking make in your workplace or school?
- Given that we live in a fallen world with corrupt leaders how can you begin to honor the authority placed over you today?
- Do you value heavenly rewards more than earthly rewards? Why do you think that is?
- How does it help your frustration with the our society to remember that all of us are equal before God?
- What about the truth that God rewards unseen good works?

---

<sup>1</sup> Harold Hoehner, Ephesians: *An Exegetical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 800-804.