

**(29) SLAVES AND MASTERS - SLAVES OF CHRIST**  
**(SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 2020)**

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**Scripture Reading:** Leviticus 25:39-43; Eph. 6:5-9

**INTRODUCTION**

In Greek mythology Sisyphus was a king who was punished for his evil deeds by being forced to push an enormous boulder up a hill only to have it roll down.

He had to keep doing this over and over again.

Some philosophers like Albert Camus thought this was an appropriate description of the human condition. We look for meaning in life only to see it all tumble down again.<sup>1</sup> This is the reality for those who are guided only by human reason.

Our nation has been so richly blessed with material prosperity and freedom, but we see increasingly the emptiness that characterizes the lives of so many in both cities and rural areas.

Our text is a call that we must bow before the true sovereign, the Lord Jesus Christ.

No matter what your situation is in life, whether you are rich or poor, brown, black, yellow, or white, have you bowed the knee in faith and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Slaves and masters, you are slaves of Christ.

Workers and Bosses, you are slaves of Christ.

**Do you submit and live in slavery to the Lord Jesus Christ?<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Aronson, Ronald, "Albert Camus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/camus/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Klyne Snodgrass believed this to be the most important application of this text.

We will look at Ephesians 6:5-9 in two parts: vv. 5-8 and v. 9.

### 1) SLAVES, OBEY, VV. 5-8

Some scholars estimate that during the first century the Roman Empire had around 60 million total inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

Compare this with the 1860 US Census which showed there were a little over 31 million inhabitants in America. This included almost 4 million slaves, over 10% of the total population.<sup>4</sup>

Some have estimated that in the Roman Empire as much as 1/3 of the population were slaves. Others would suggest this is closer to 1/5 across the entire empire, so maybe closer to 12 million slaves.<sup>5</sup>

Klyne Snodgrass gives some helpful background information:

People became slaves through various avenues: birth, parental selling or abandonment, captivity in war, inability to pay debts, and voluntary attempts to better one's condition. Race was not a factor. No doubt for many slaves life was harsh and cruel, but their circumstances depended on their owners. **They did not merely do menial work; they did nearly all the work**, including oversight and management and most professions. Many were educated better than their owners. They could own property, even other slaves, and were allowed to save money to buy their freedom. No slave class existed, for slaves were present in all but the highest economic and social strata. Many gained freedom by age thirty, especially in urban areas. Even after gaining freedom, however, they were still under obligation to their former owners in times of need.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical\\_demography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_demography)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1860\\_United\\_States\\_Census](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1860_United_States_Census)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ancient.eu/article/629/slavery-in-the-roman-world/>

<sup>6</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne. Ephesians (The NIV Application Commentary Book 10) (p. 327). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

The fact that Scripture addresses slaves with specific instructions in Colossians 3, here in Ephesians 6, 1 Tim. 6, Titus 2, and 1 Peter 2 shows that there must have been a good number of Christians in the first century who were slaves.

Listen also to the instruction of Scripture in 1 Cor. 7.

**1Cor. 7:21** Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made **free**, rather use *it*. **22** For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called *while* **free** is Christ's slave.

There is much that we can say from the perspective of Scripture on the subject of slavery, but let us focus on our text.

As we can see, verses 5-8 speak to bondservants or slaves.

Verse 9 speaks to masters.

Both slaves and masters are given one basic command. And then that command is further explained.

Let's consider the instruction given to slaves.

The word **bondservant** is a good translation. Some older translations read servant. Newer translations read slave.

The word is *doulos*, which speaks of a male slave. The word is used 127 times in the NT, most often in the gospel of Matthew.

Slavery was a basic part of life when the NT was written.

**Rom. 1:1** Paul, a **bondservant** of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

What is the basic command given to slaves?

It is the call to obey your earthly masters.

Now interestingly the word **master** is the word *kurios* or lord. It is used of the Lord Jesus Christ. It can be used to speak of an earthly lord or master as it is here – masters according to the flesh.

The basic duty of slaves is to be **obedient**. This is the same verb used in verse 1 for children.

Now one thing we can say from this instruction is that though slaves may have been at the low end of society, they had meaning and purpose as they did their work to the Lord.

**We are not just part of a meaningless system.**

The instruction that we have here is the same instruction that you find all throughout the NT. You may not like it. Maybe you can even get your freedom.

Your master might be cruel and unfair.

You have the duty to obey.

But we also notice that this is not where the instruction ends.

God does not give this command and just move on.

No, there is a beautiful explanation of this command. It doesn't change the command, but shows the reason for the command.

So the second thing we should observe from this text is how the command to obey is really fleshed out.

A slave might rightly ask, why should I obey, Lord? My life is miserable. My master is wicked and cruel.

Eight descriptions and reasons are given.

First, with fear and trembling.

Is this fear and trembling of God or man?

In Col. 3:22 it is clearly fear of God. What about here?

There is some debate among commentators, but it would seem that the fear and trembling described here are for human masters.<sup>7</sup>

The words are strong but are not to be interpreted in a wooden or literal fashion. The meaning is respect.

There should be great respect that is given. **This is serious.**

Second, the obedience is to be sincere, from the heart.

What you see is what you get, one Greek lexicon notes.<sup>8</sup>

Third and what is central throughout this section, **the obedience is ultimately to Jesus Christ.**

There are at least five references to God and Christ in this section. This is very significant.

Your ultimate slavery is to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, your service is not to be eyeservice as men-pleasers.

The NET Bible reads, “not like those who do their work only when someone is watching.”

The Apostle Paul might have invented this word eyeservice. It is a great word.

Don’t just obey when others are looking.

Don’t just obey to please men.

Fifth, the central issue is again highlighted – but as bondservants of Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 420. MacArthur takes this position also as does Snodgrass.

<sup>8</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ἀπλότης,” 104.

And this is the repeated emphasis of this entire section and true of all people.

All men and women must bow the knee before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sixth, doing the will of God from the heart.

Jesus said in **Mark 3:35** "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

**1Pet. 4:19** Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Slaves, you are to do the will of man as you are instructed. But again most of all, do the will of God from your heart!

Seventh, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.

The NET Bible translates as, "**Obey with enthusiasm.**"

There is to be a good, positive attitude, not a begrudging attitude.

Eighth, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free.

Isn't this an amazing statement?

I can't explain easily how it all works. From our earthly perspective, does this seem to be true?

Maybe you have heard the phrase, no good deed goes unpunished. It is not a Biblical statement, obviously, but a merely earthly reflection on matters.

The perspective that matters is the divine, heavenly perspective.

And this means that serving the Lord is never in vain.

Here is the place of true freedom.

A basic rule of all labor is payment and sometimes even incentives.

You work. Your employer is to pay you.

Some situations given bonuses or raises for good work.

Sometimes the situation is not always from your perspective fair. A person who might not be a good worker gets more money than you do because of some other factor.

But here is where you can fully trust that the Lord is perfectly just.

Now we think, what do we ultimately deserve from God?

Do you want to answer that?

Verse 8 is not self-earned righteousness, but it is an incentive to bow the knee before the Lord Jesus Christ and know that your labor is never in vain.

You should seek to do as much good as you possibly can.

**Anything but excellence, honesty, and determination is not an insult to man, but to the King of Kings!**

## **2) MASTERS, DO THE SAME, V. 9**

The ESVSB notes the following about masters in the ancient world.

Masters in antiquity had the power of life and death over their slaves. Beatings, imprisonment, or sale into harsher servitude were other punishments masters meted out.

There is one command given to masters in verse 9 along with an expansion or explanation of this command.

What is the central command?

Do the same things to them.

This is an interesting command.

What does it mean?

It doesn't mean that master becomes the slave, but they are to be united in showing respect, doing good, and most importantly serving the Lord.

Two things are added to this.

Imagine how you could use the power of life, death, and beatings if you have authority over another person.

Don't you think that beyond actually using these powers you would find a nice place for threatening to use them.

**Give up your use of threatening.**

The verb **give up** is used just four times in the NT.

I think there is probably a verbal play in its use here.

The word can mean to **loosen chains**. Masters are to give up or loosen the threatening that would be used to bind a slave.<sup>9</sup>

Notice that verse 8 begins with the word knowing.

We also see this in verse 9 – knowing that your own Master also is in heaven.

This is a powerful picture.

You think you have power over others. Know very well, you have someone in heaven who has complete power over you.

And then the final description to this – there is no partiality with Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ does not take sides. He deals with pure justice. There is no way to bribe or manipulate the King of Glory!

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<sup>9</sup> This is my own analysis. I did not see this mentioned in any commentaries.

## CONCLUSION

The history of slavery is a long, disgusting, and cruel history.

Our own nation has been profoundly affected by slavery.

Thomas Sowell points out:

Of all the tragic facts about the history of slavery, the most astonishing to an American today is that, although slavery was a worldwide institution for thousands of years, nowhere in the world was slavery a controversial issue prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. People of every race and color were enslaved – and enslaved others. White people were still being bought and sold as slaves in the Ottoman Empire, decades after American blacks were freed.

According to a National Geographic article there are an estimated 27 million men, women, and children who are enslaved or treated as property today.<sup>10</sup>

All of this is connected with man's evil heart and slavery to sin and the devil.

The word of God does speak to this issue as we see clearly.

Without ignoring injustice, Scripture points to what is most important – do you know the salvation found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you a slave to Christ?

And this profound calling should affect us powerfully as we seek to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are in Christ, then there is incredible meaning and purpose in life.

Make sure that is your focus.

And we know that our nation is under judgment in many ways.

We see powerful forces wanting to destroy.

How we need to pray for the mighty advancement of the gospel in these very uncertain times.

A faithful, bold witness during these times will never be in vain.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.aei.org/carpe-diem/thomas-sowell-on-slavery-and-this-fact-there-are-more-slaves-today-than-were-seized-from-africa-in-four-centuries/>

**Prayer**

**Hymn 476**

**BENEDICTION – BULLETIN**