

**“THE LITTLE CHURCH:
MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY”
PART 6- “SINCERE-HEARTED SLAVES”
EPHESIANS 6:1-9
REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS**

This is our final sermon on the family from our mini-series in the Book of Ephesians. Ephesians 6:1-9 is about *submission to God and to the governing authorities He has placed over us.*

The larger context of Ephesians 6:1-9 is about the duties and responsibilities that inferiors (children, slaves; we might say “employees”) have to superiors (parents, masters), and the duties and responsibilities that superiors (parents, masters) have to their inferiors in the household of faith.

We are superiors (parents or “those in high positions”) as well as inferiors (children or “those in low positions”) in our callings at different seasons in our life. There are duties and responsibilities of superiors to inferiors as well as duties and responsibilities of inferiors to superiors.

The Apostle Paul is expositing the practical implications of what the 5th commandment teaches: “Honor your father and your mother.”

Who are our fathers and mothers? Superiors such as parents, authorities in position over us such as our teachers, our elders, our employers, our leaders, etc.

The Larger Catechism, Question 125: **“Why are superiors called father and mother?”**
Answer: Superiors are called father and mother, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their different relationships; and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents.”

I encourage you to familiarize yourself with questions 123-133 of the Westminster Larger Catechism on the duties and sins of superiors, inferiors and equals.

Today we will focus primarily on how the Apostle Paul is using the slave-master relationship to instruct concerning authority and a principle for serving the Lord Jesus.

Paul is using the ancient relationship of slave and master not to teach that slavery is ideal, or that it has God’s approval as an institution.

Rather, the Apostle Paul is teaching the importance of submitting to Christ, and obeying and honoring those in authority above us.

We are ultimately submissive to our authority for two reasons:

1. **Fear of God:** God has established the authority and so we are serving Christ through this authority (“ministers” in Christ’s stead in world, family and church- Romans 13:1-7).
2. **Love to Christ:** Christ has submitted to the Father on our behalf to die for us and to redeem us unto **good works.**

ESV Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We are Christ’s “workmanship” as His slaves, so that we will do our work as good workmanship unto Him!

ESV Ephesians 6:7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man...

Love to Christ is shown through our obedience and submission to our superiors’ God-given authority.

“Sincere “Hearted” Service as Slaves of Christ”

Since we don’t have the institution of slavery in our present life in the United States, some preach from this passage on the relationships and responsibilities that employees have to employers and vice versa.

I think this is helpful.

The principle that the Apostle Paul is articulating here is that no matter what our position in the world as Christians, we must be reminded that we are ultimately serving Chris, whether master or slave.

We will be **accountable for our service**, and so we should do all that we do as “unto the LORD” or for the “glory of God” no matter what position we hold.

The Lord Jesus wants us all to learn from the earliest time in our life to obey our parents, to honor our parents, to learn through this submission to authority, how to submit to other God-given authorities throughout our lives.

Two Questions concerning service we should think about?

Who are we? Is our identity primarily defined by our position in this world? Social and economic statuses, or by our relationship to the LORD Christ?

Our work, our positions can come to ultimately define us. “What do you do?” “How much do you make” (i.e. “How important are you?”)?

What motivates us? Why do we work? How do we work? Is this defined by how important we perceive our work to be, or how much we are paid? Or by the fact, we serve the LORD Christ?

Our motivation can be to merely please man; our motivation can be the “big bucks” so that we can have a lot of stuff (or “getting ahead of others” or “climbing the ladder” etc).

Jesus not only redeems the family, and our relationships (which we see in marriage, with our children, and also with masters and slaves), but he also redeems our work, and the reason for us doing it.

Service is Good; Work is Good.

Man was created to work; sin brought thorns and thistles, but man was created to work and be satisfied in one’s work.

Man was created to work for God, not self. Man was created as an **means to glorifying and enjoying God, but work can become an end in itself: prestige, position, pay, etc.**

Only after the fall did mankind seek to make a name for themselves, rather than to do it for the glory of God, as part of their daily worship.

*^{ESV} Colossians 3:23 **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...***

Slaves of Christ

Slavery in the Roman Empire

Paul is using slavery to Christ in Ephesians 6:5-9 as an incentive and motivation to serve with wholeheartedness those in our superior over us in authority.

But this imagery should not merely be spiritualized.

It is estimated that over 60,000,000 folks were slaves in the Roman Empire to whom Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians. It is estimated that in the City of Ephesus alone 1/3 of the population would have been slaves.

Slaves in the Roman Empire worked in the “lower positions” in society such as house servants, carpenters, farmers, mid-wives, “nannies”, etc; slaves also held “higher positions” in society as slaves who became doctors, sometimes lawyers, and teachers. Slaves could be both (what we call) “blue collar” or “white collar” workers.

But they were not free; they often could obtain their freedom; but they were not usually born free if they were slave children.

It should be remembered (and there can be another sermon just on this topic and subject) that slavery in the Roman Empire was much different from the slavery in the West that we often think about.

Slavery in the Roman Empire was an institution where men and women from different races and nations could submit to slavery in order to attend schools of higher education, to pay off bills, to work for a season; slavery was oftentimes willingly entered into in order to become the master's "son" to work for him until the slave was able to take care of himself and his family (but again, this should be another sermon).

Slaves in the Roman Empire were considered part of the **household**. This is why the Apostle Paul addresses slaves and masters here in the context of the "little church" the family.

When masters were saved and became Christians, their entire households would confess Christianity under the master's headship; in many ways, masters in the ancient world considered slaves not only part of their families but as their "children". As their own children received the covenant sign of baptism, so the entire household did as well, which meant that slaves were included (remember the Philippian jailer; cf. Acts 10)?

^{ESV} **Acts 16:32-34:** And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to **all who were in his house**.³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, **he and all his family**.³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with **his entire household that he had believed in God**.

Differences between slaves and mere employees that must be recognized:

Slaves had to do their work or they could be physically and/or mentally-psychologically punished ("threatened"- Eph. 6:9) by their masters.

So we shouldn't merely jump to "employees" and their relationship to their employers because most of the time, employees are free to find another job, another employer, etc. Slaves could not always do this.

However, **the principle here is one of service from the heart from the heart.**

All of us as slaves of Christ need to understand this.

Using “slaves of Christ” is not meant to undermine the heinous atrocities that were committed by masters in the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire.

Using “slaves of Christ” is what Paul is doing here to remind both slaves (in that position in the society) and masters in the higher position in the society) are both slaves and both have masters.

Ephesians 6:5: “Slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh” implying a heavenly Lord and Masters; Ephesians 6:9: “Masters...He who is both their Master (Lord) and yours in heaven...”

They will be accountable before Christ for what they have done.

Using “slaves of Christ” let us be mindful of our duties ultimately to him.

One of the Apostle Paul’s favorite descriptions of himself and the Christian life is the term “slave of Christ” or “bondslave of Jesus Christ” (also of the other Biblical writers: Acts 16:17; 1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Cor. 6:4; Phi. 1:1; 1 Peter 2:16; Rev. 7:3).

We want to avoid two imbalances: On the one hand we do not want to merely spiritualize the term “slave” undermining the reality of this heinous institution in the ancient world, and even places in the modern world.

On the other hand, we don’t want to miss the importance in light of the ancient institution, of understanding our identity in Christ as Christians.

We are God’s slaves. *All believers are God’s slaves.*

We are God’s property; his possession.

We are not our own; we have been bought with a price; the precious blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:6-8).

This means that we are slaves of Christ. We need to understand this passage in light of the Apostle Paul’s larger use of this term to describe the Christian life.

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul spoke of Christians (the “little church”) being mutually submissive to one another under the Lordship of Christ:

^{ESV} Ephesians 5:21 “...Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Christ is LORD; that is HE is our Master.

We are slaves of Christ in our relationships; we are slaves of Christ in all that we do - but we must remember that whatever positions we hold in this world, we are slaves of Jesus; we are his servants.

Paul uses the language of Christians being slaves of righteousness whereas we were once slaves of sin.

Slaves of righteousness, are slaves of God, slaves of Christ, but we are also children.

*^{ESV} Romans 6:16-22” Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as **obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?**¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you **who were once slaves of sin** have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become **slaves of righteousness.**¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, **so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.**²⁰ When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death.²² **But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.***

You will notice that all are slaves in this world.

We are either enslaved to the passions of our sinful nature.

Or we are slaves of Jesus Christ- -freed from bondage to sin, death and hell- -so that we might truly serve and live joyfully in this present age!

As Christ is our LORD and Master, so we are His slaves (modern translations want to use “servant” but I think this undercuts the redemption of slavery, and the reality of our being God’s possession and no longer our own).

God is our proprietor; we are his property in Jesus.

In light of this, let us seek to understand our position in submission to Christ our Master, and in mutual submission to each other as being slaves in different ways and in different relationships throughout our lives.

In this life, whether we are truly slaves, or bondservants of another, or whether we are in possession of a higher position such as master, we are nevertheless equally Christ’s, and to Christ we must be accountable and work with all of our heart.

If we understand ourselves as slaves of Christ, there will be three (3) implications:

- 1) As slaves of Christ, there is obedience first to God, then man.
- 2) As slaves of Christ there is true sincerity of Heart
- 3) As slaves of Christ, there is accountability to the Lord.

1) As slaves of Christ we will be obedient to God first, then man.

“Obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29), otherwise love and serve man for Christ.

Implications and application of serving as “slaves of Christ” in whatever position we are called:

- Service to authority over you: employers, soldiers, interns, elders, pastors, government officials, etc. *No matter how they treat you!?* (Wisdom)
- Obedience that is “with fear and trembling” (6:5; cf. 5:21).
- Remembering that we are slaves of Christ help us to do whatever we do for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- Unless we are commanded to do what is unlawful or unbiblical.

2) As slaves of Christ we will work with Sincerity of Heart (1 Timothy 1:5; Col. 3:22-24)

Christ wants to redeem our **attitudes, motivations and actions**. We are not to be merely obedience servants outwardly and externally, but also obedient servants in attitude and motivation.

^{ESV} Ephesians 6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters [“masters according to the flesh] with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ...

- “Obedience from a **“sincere heart”** (ἀπλότητι Gk.- means generously, liberality, singlehearted devotion, “gives without reserve”).
- Obedience should be with a “sincere heart” (v.5); a heart of submission like we serve Christ (v. 5).
- **Opposite of sincerity or “service from the heart”:** “Eye-Service” as people pleasers (6:6)

ὀφθαλμοδουλίαν ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι

“...Eye service as people pleasers”

Living as a people-pleaser only to serve with “eye-service” or only serving when your superior is watching you is hypocritical.

This is the same sin as the Pharisees doing prayers, fastings, giving tithes only to be **“seen by men”**; they had their reward in full (Matt. 6:1-8).

Our hearts must be given to the LORD Jesus lest they be rebellious and hypocritical and lazy.

Richard Baxter said that some slave-servants take more care to seem painful, trusty servants, than to actually be so; to hide their faults and laziness rather than avoid it; as if it were easy to hide them also from God.

- Rebellion
- Lazy
- Hypocritical

Richard Baxter wrote that grudging and unwillingness makes your work of little value, be it never so well done.

- **To be truly obedient to our superiors, we must have hearts submitted to Jesus.**

^{ESV} Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...

Christians can serve in a way the world cannot. Christians can serve freely, knowing that whatever good we do, the Lord Jesus is ultimately the ONE for whom we’re doing it!

The more we understand and realize God’s love for us in Jesus, how he rejoices in us even in our frailties, and has made us his possession, the more we will have the gratitude and hearts of sincerity to serve for His glory!

^{ESV} Ephesians 6:8 Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

- **How can you serve like this?**
- **Knowing that Christ gave his whole life away for you.**
- **Christ died for us so that we could live for Him.**

- Christ served as a slave generously, so that we could serve Him as His slave- generously, without reserve, liberally, single-heartedly!
- Christ redeems our work so that we can enjoy God in it.
 - Some enjoy work for the sake of working.
 - Some enjoy work for what they can get out of it.
 - The “slave of Christ” should enjoy work because they can enjoy God and please Him as they were created to do!

"God richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). One kind of person seeks to enjoy God alone, and not what he gives us to enjoy (asceticism). One kind of person seeks to enjoy what God gives to us but fails to acknowledge and enjoy God (idolatry). One kind of person seeks to glorify and enjoy God by enjoying Him and the things he has given to us in proper measure and with gratitude.

3) As Slaves of Christ, there is Accountability “to the LORD” (6:9a)

No Partiality (6:9b)/ No Favoritism

Proud in “High Position” → “I’m Important.”

Proud in “Low Position” → “I deserve more...I deserve better...”

Economically, socially, ethnically, one may hold a very “important” place (according to the world’s way of measuring success). But in God’s economy it’s not those who have certain positions and privileges in this world who are important.

Rather, the truly important folks are Christians who in Christ have done good works as they were created in Him to do (not works to save a person; a person is saved by grace; but a person is saved unto good works).

*^{ESV} **Romans 2:6-10: He will render to each one according to his works:**⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.*

Accountability to Jesus Implies these:

Three specific ways Christianity planted the seeds to the destruction of slavery in the world:

1) Equality between slave and master.

*ESV Galatians 3:26-28: for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.
27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is **neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***

2) Justice between slave and master.

*ESV Ephesians 6:9 Masters, **do the same to them, and stop your threatening,** knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.*

*ESV Colossians 4:1 Masters, **treat your slaves justly and fairly,** knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

3) The Brotherhood between slave and master; the same family in Christ Jesus- They are both Christians; they are both slaves of Jesus.

*ESV Philemon 1:15-16: For this perhaps is why [Onesimus] was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ **no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother - especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.***

Jesus was LORD of both master and slave.

Jesus made master and slaves ***brothers*** rather than ***proprietor and property***. Slavery would be abolished from within men's hearts throughout history and men came to understand this!

In God's sovereignty and in His kind providence He has assigned all of us a position in this world.

- **Be thankful for your position in Christ:** We should think differently about our positions in this world. Wherever we are, no matter how little importance we think we have, we are important in our service to Christ.
- ***Christ thinks highly of any work we do.*** It doesn't matter to Christ what position in this world we hold; what matters to Him is how well we do our work from the heart for His glory.

- Let this encourage the way you work. We do work for others, but ultimately, we are taught here that Christ will be generous in his repaying our labors, even though we are unworthy servants (Luke 17:10):

ESV Ephesians 6:8 Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

- **Focus on Christ in your work!** Calvin wrote: “What a powerful consolation! However unworthy, however ungrateful or cruel, their masters may be, God will accept their services as rendered to himself. When servants take into consideration the pride and arrogance of their masters, they often become indolent from the thought that their labor is thrown away. But Paul informs them that their reward is laid up with God for services which appear to be ill bestowed on unfeeling men...” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. 21, 331).

The work of Christ has turned all positions in the world upside down!

Luke 1:46-53: "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

Christ shows no partiality; he made himself nothing, even becoming a slave to redeem us (Phil. 2:4ff).

God “came down” very low in a very poor position as slave to redeem His people in Jesus!

John 13:16-17: *Wash feet for Jesus as slaves- “Truly, Truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than His master...If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”*

Partiality is showing favor or deference because of one’s social or economic position.

Christ does not show favoritism. Christ shows absolutely no partiality.

He will judge a person’s work on how they did it unto him (Matt. 25:31ff).

ESV James 2:1-6: My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," ⁴ have

*you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?
⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be
rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶
But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and
the ones who drag you into court?*

Jesus has brought hope and redemption for our:

- Relationships
- Work

The redemption work of Jesus in Christ is to unify all things in heaven and on earth under His rule and reign (Eph. 1:9-10).

In the New Creation, we shall enjoy the perfection of the family and all of our relationships.

In the New Creation, we shall enjoy the perfection of our work, and find satisfaction in our service as slave-servants of Jesus Christ for all eternity.

CRB