

The Excellent Employee (Titus 2:9-10)

1. Socially Still a Slave, Positionally now a Brother

(Philemon 1:12-16; 1 Timothy 6:2)

- The salvation of Onesimus sheds light into the class, culture and relationship between Christian masters and slaves in the first century.
- Onesimus ran away from Philemon to Rome, was saved by Paul's ministry while in prison, and was to return to Philemon.
- Before Onesimus ran away, he was an unbelieving slave; he returns not as a just a slave...but as a brother in the Lord.
- The whole dynamic of the relationship is going to change not only temporally but eternally.
- Notice the contrasts: he left for a short time, as a slave, and now he is returning so "you may have him forever" (not as a slave but as a brother in the Lord).
- The "forever" is not in light of being a temporal slave, but as an eternal brother.
- Notice the words "in the flesh." Paul is not emancipating Onesimus. Paul acknowledges the social, cultural and institutional establishment of slavery at this time and tells Onesimus to return to Philemon as a slave.
- Onesimus is still a slave "in the flesh" but is now more. He is temporally and eternally a spiritual brother in the Lord. He is above and beyond a cultural class, or status as a slave spiritually.
- Christian slaves are still to submit to their Christian masters. The Greek word "submit" refers to one who willingly submits to another, despite being equal in dignity and worth. This same word is used to describe wives submitting to their husbands (Titus 2:5).
- The gospel did not immediately eliminate social or cultural classes (such as slavery). It assaulted the culture of slavery and put divine pressure on the morality of slavery as a social institution.
- It would have been difficult for a Christian slave to submit to a Christian master. It would have been even more challenging for a Christian master to fully endorse slavery as a commercial enterprise. Christianity convoluted the cultural institution of slavery. It was this eternal, positional pressure that would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery.

2. Slaves Must Still Submit to their Masters

(1 Corinthians 7:17-24; Ephesians 6:7-8; Titus 2:9-10)

- Christian slaves are still to submit to their masters and choose to willingly bring themselves under the authority of their masters, regardless of whether or not they are Christians.

Five traits of the faithful Christian slave:

- A. Submissive in everything: Everything means “everything that does not require disobedience to the Lord.” Every Christian slave belongs first to the Lord, and secondly to his earthly master. Obedience to the Lord takes precedence over anyone or anything else. A slave could not serve two masters (Matthew 6:24; Acts 4:18-19).
- B. Well-Pleasing: also translated as “acceptable.” It means “that which causes someone to be well-pleasing.” It refers not only to the quality of the work, but the disposition of the heart that fueled the quality of the work. Even if a slave’s master treated him poorly, the Lord will reward him (Ephesians 6:7-8).
- C. Not argumentative: the slave does not “speak against” his master. He does not gossip or bash his boss behind his back (especially to others). When a slave was converted to Christ, he would naturally confuse his social inequality with his spiritual equality.
- D. Not pilfering: also means to “keep back, or to appropriate for one’s own use.” It means to embezzle, or to keep proceeds back (Acts 5). It refers to taking beyond what is necessary to complete a task for personal gain.

3. Now Servants, Not Slaves

- The gospel creates a new kingdom and with that kingdom, a new heart. With a new heart, comes new affections, and with those new affections is a greater value placed on God, and as a result, man. The gospel would have placed pressure on the culture to re-evaluate the morality of slavery.
 - Slavery no longer exists today as a social institution, but we are servants now.
 - The excellent employee (Christian):
 - Is to be obedient and well-pleasing to God first and foremost
 - Is not to be harsh, complain, or argue to his superior
 - Must not take beyond what is necessary from his employer to complete a task that is related to the job
 - Will pray that God will honor him as he seeks opportunities for gospel conversation at work with unbelievers, and that he may encourage others in their walk of obedience to the Lord
- E. Adorned: The Greek word “adorned” means to “beautify, to arrange, or improve.” It is not the gospel that needs to be improved on; it is us. We need to be beautified by Christ, which happens primarily through us yielding to the Holy Spirit through the intake and meditation on the Word of God. When we put on the Lord Jesus Christ through his Word, we are adorned with power. The adorning is not dependent upon the social class, but on submission to the Lord. How we speak and act will make the Good News truly good news.