

## First Timothy: The Household of God

What About Slavery, Paul?

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### WHAT ABOUT SLAVERY, PAUL? 1 Timothy 6:1-2

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, please open with me to 1 Timothy 6. While you are turning there, I just want to thank you for praying for me last week as I was in Minnesota at a missions conference there. It was a good thing to gather together with 3,000 brothers and sisters who are all intentionally and intensively praying about how their lives can be used to make the gospel known among the unreached peoples, but it's even better to come back to a faith family of 4,000 plus where we are all looking intentionally at how our lives can be used to spread the gospel to unreached peoples. So, I trust that time in the last half of 1 Timothy 5 was good, leading us now into 1 Timothy 6:1-2.

"Four score and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Doubtless you recognize those words as the beginning of one of the most famous speeches in American history, the Gettysburg Address, delivered by then-President Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863. A call for equality that was a direct affront to the practice of slavery in the Confederate South. Some would even say, "The Christian South." Pastors and church members all across communities in this state and other states who were buying, selling, trading, using and abusing predominantly African slaves. Without question, one of the darkest periods in American Christian history, a period of history that makes a passage like we are reading this morning a bit sensitive to us in this room.

Paul says,

*"Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved."*

So, as soon as we read that, we think, "Is Paul endorsing slavery? Is the New Testament endorsing slavery?" You go into the Old Testament, and you see slavery discussed there and you begin to think, "Does God support slavery?" This has been one of the more significant, especially recent, questions posed to Christianity particularly in light of the practice of slavery by Christians in Europe and America. So, what does the Bible say about slavery and why would Paul write like he is writing here in 1 Timothy 6:1-2, and what does that have to do with our understanding of the gospel and slavery in the world today?

That's what I want us to dive into, and we're going to be all over Scripture so get ready to turn to some different places. Keep 1 Timothy 6 as home base; turn to some different places. There will be places we won't have time to turn to that you might write down, different verses.

## Slavery in History

### **World history is filled with various types of slavery.**

Before we even dive into Scripture, I want us to think preliminarily...and you can put this in your notes...just a minute about slavery and history because world history is filled with various different types of slavery. So, when I say the word "slavery," I am confident that certain images pop into your mind all across this room. I'm guessing, based on different people's backgrounds, different images pop into your mind when you hear the word "slavery." You immediately associate that word with practices, abuses, injustices. So, what we need to realize from the very beginning is that this word slavery actually represents many different practices in the history of the world, some of which are far worse than others. So, I want to bring four different types of slavery to the table this morning to help us kind of get some perspective on this passage.

First, Hebrew servanthood. This is where...hold your place here in 1 Timothy 6 but turn with me over to Leviticus 25. We'll come back to 1 Timothy in just a minute. Leviticus is the third book in the Bible, Leviticus 25. When we see God's law in the Old Testament, what we see is a history of Hebrew servanthood here, and the way it was set up was for impoverished Israelites to, basically, sell themselves into slavery, into servanthood, in order to provide for themselves and their families. Now, we know from Deuteronomy 15 that God's desire was that no one would be poor among His people. At the same time, in a sinful world, poverty would come. So, God made provision for those in poverty through this picture of Hebrew servanthood. Look at Leviticus 25, start in verse 35; Leviticus 25:35. This was God's Word to His people.

*"If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God."*

Then, it goes on. Now, what this is talking about is the people of Israel...an impoverished Israelite. What it goes on to talk about after this is impoverished foreigners, which we don't have time to dive into, so just leave this picture of Hebrew servanthood here. Basically, what you've got is a system set up where an impoverished Israelite could sell himself into slavery to, basically, work as a hired servant for a master, and in the process, pay off debt that he might owe, get to a point where he could stand on his own. It talks about the year of jubilee. Every seven years from the seventh year, all slaves would have the opportunity to be set free; all servants in this kind of situation would have the opportunity to be set free. All of this is a picture, basically, similar to indentured servitude, which we'll get to in just a second, but you've got Israelites who, in the Old Testament, would enter into a picture where they would work as a hired servant for another Israelite in order to, basically, get back on their feet.

I want us to realize, from the very beginning, then, that what we see when it comes to slavery in the Old Testament is very different from what we see when it comes to pre-war slavery in the Southern United States...very, very different picture. That's Old Testament, Hebrew servanthood.

You turn the pages of the New Testament, and you are introduced to Greco-Roman slavery, which was altogether different than Hebrew servanthood. So, you've got the Old Testament background of slavery in Hebrew servanthood, then you come to the New Testament background, and you've got Roman slavery. Slavery was very prevalent throughout the Roman Empire and Roman economy. Some estimate that up to a third of the people in the Roman Empire would have been slaves. Some estimate up to 50 or 60 million people. So, when you think about it...even the New Testament picture of slavery, the Roman slavery background here...out of 50 or 60 million slaves, you've got all kinds of different pictures of slavery, even in this one time period. So, you've got some people who were slaves, which, basically, meant they were employees that worked in different ways. Some were teachers, some were craftsmen, others were managers, others were cooks, some were government officials, and many of those slaves even owned slaves themselves.

So, someone might sell themselves into slavery; that would actually be a path, for some, to gain Roman citizenship, a standing in Roman society and, in a lot of cases like this, Roman slavery was very much humane, even helpful, providing security and stability for slaves in a variety of different venues. Many slaves would be released by the time they were 30 and able, basically, to stand on their own.

Now, in giving this picture of a much more humane even helpful picture of slavery, I don't want to gloss over the fact that slavery was, obviously, not necessarily ideal or perfect, or even good in many circumstances. A slave was still a slave, oftentimes disgraced in society, oftentimes marginalized and powerless, and out of those 50-60 million slaves, doubtless many of them were subjected to very hard labor, and likely sexual and physical abuse. So, slavery was certainly not ideal, but the point is Greco-Roman slavery looked very different than Old Testament, Hebrew servanthood, and in many ways and many cases, looked very different again than slavery we might think of in American history.

So, that leads us to American history. The third picture of slavery in world history, and if you think about it, indentured servitude, which was, obviously, popular in colonial America. Many of the people who came from Europe to America couldn't afford to do that on their own, and so they would contract themselves out as indentured servants. They would agree to work in a certain household, an apprentice-type role, in order to pay off their debt for coming to America. Many historians estimate that at least half, if not two-thirds, of European, white immigrants who came to America came as indentured servants. So, this picture was a lot more similar to the Hebrew servanthood that we see in the Old Testament.

So, you've got Old Testament, Hebrew servanthood, New Testament, and the background there is Greco-Roman slavery. Then, you've got colonial America, and you think about indentured servitude, and then you come to the African slave trade, a practice promoted in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries whereby millions and millions of Africans were sold and traded across Europe and America. Transported, you know the history, in cruel, grueling conditions that would leave many of them dead before they made it to port. Then, upon being sold into slavery, would be subjected to harsh working conditions, and oftentimes physical and sexual abuse and torture.

Frederick Douglas described his first master this way, Captain Anthony. He said,

"He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slave holding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine whom he used to tie up to a joist and whipped till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayer from his gory victim seemed to move his iron heart from its iron purpose."

Then, it gets more graphic as he goes on. I read that simply to remind us of the horror of what took place in slavery in communities like this not that long ago in world history, and I read that to make clear that this is not the kind of slavery that Paul is addressing in 1 Timothy 6.

So, 1 Timothy 6 will indeed be very, very confusing to us if that is the image you have of slavery when you read Paul's admonition here. Just remember Paul is not addressing slaves here who are sitting outside in quarters where they are ostracized and tortured. Instead, he is speaking to a church where you've got slaves and masters sitting right next to one another in a body where they are commanded daily to love one another, care for one another, support one another, provide for one another. He's giving them specific instructions for how this might look in a sinful system, a sinful world that involves slavery and masters.

So, keep that in mind when you come to this picture of slavery. If the immediate image that pops in your mind when you read 1 Timothy 6:1-2 is that which Frederick Douglas described, then I want to encourage you to begin to adjust that image, not to gloss over African slave trade history and the horror of it, but to understand a little bit better the New Testament world. History is filled with all kinds of pictures of slavery, which leads us to biblical history.

**Biblical history is filled with various perspectives on slavery.**

When you think about this...biblical history, then, itself is filled with various perspectives on slavery, meaning that the way Leviticus addresses Hebrew servanthood in the Old Testament is going to be different than the way Paul addresses Roman slavery in the New Testament. In all of this, it is imperative to realize a few things: one, slavery is not a part of creation, i.e. God's original order, but slavery is a product of sin. That is key. You look in Genesis 1-2, you see a distinction between male and female, but you see no distinction between slave and free. This is not a part of God's original creation; this is a product of the fall. Which is when you fast-forward in Scripture to see new creation in the end...the picture of heaven...there is no slave and free there. Where sin will be no more, slavery will be no more. Heaven will know nothing of indentured servanthood, class warfare that led to a Greco-Roman slavery, and will know nothing of abuse or mistreatment that we have seen in our history in the African slave trade.

Where sin is no more, slavery is no more. Slavery is a product of sin, which then leads us to realize that, when we see slavery mentioned in the Bible, you've got specific situations in a sinful world that warrant specific instructions to a sinful world. So, you've got different circumstances that are being addressed in Leviticus and 1 Timothy that are addressing the presence of sin in the world that result in slavery in the world, which then leads us to the third thing you have in your notes there: the final realization that biblical instruction concerning slavery...this is key...do not imply biblical approval of slavery.

So, put it all together. Slavery is not God's original design, not God's ultimate desire. It's a product of sin in the world. So, then when we see Paul, for example, addressing slavery, it doesn't mean he is endorsing it. Instead, he is helping shepherd people who are involved in a sinful system where slavery is prevalent.

This is not the only time Scripture does something like this. You think about divorce, for example. Divorce not a part of God's original creation, not a part in any way of God's ultimate desire...no divorce in heaven, or marriage in heaven for that matter, but no divorce. In the very beginning in Genesis 1 and 2, you see man and woman united together. It is a product of sin that men and women divide like they do, and divorce becomes a reality. So, in Scripture, you see in the Old Testament, and even Jesus in the New Testament, giving regulations concerning divorce. Such regulations don't imply an endorsement of divorce. Instead, they address an effect of sin in the world and how to respond to it. So, that is what we are seeing in slavery.

So, I want you see that when the Bible even addresses slavery like this, it's addressing it as a product of sin in the world and in different ways according to different circumstances. So, all of that helps us understand what's going on in 1 Timothy 6. So, we're going to get to 1 Timothy 6, but I want to kind of keep us here when it comes to slavery in Scripture with an overall picture of God's Word on slavery; it will help us understand what these two verses mean.

## Slavery in Scripture

### **The Bible condemns slavery.**

So, look at your notes there at slavery in Scripture. First and foremost, what I want you to see is that in clear ways the Bible condemns slavery. The Bible condemns slavery for the exact reasons we were just talking about in creation. The Bible condemns slavery that undermines God's creation. Genesis 1:27...we don't have time to turn there, but you know this: *"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."* God created men and women with equal dignity before God, and anything that undermines that dignity, including slavery, that functionally denies that dignity, dishonors God. Lincoln did not come up with the idea that all men are created equal. God came up with that.

Job 31:15, you might write that one down. Job is talking about a servant, so Job had servants in Old Testament, Hebrew servanthood. He's talking about in Job 31:15, and he says, *"Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?"* The implication is there that we have equal dignity before God, and it's not just Old Testament.

New Testament, Galatians 3:28, Paul says that *"in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* So, yes, we have differences, but we all have equal dignity before God and equal position in Christ. It's the basis upon which James, in James 2, says, *"Do not show favoritism."* We all have equal dignity before God. So, this is one of those areas where the Bible may not be prohibiting, expressly, all forms of slavery, but it is absolutely ripping apart the foundation of slavery that says one person has more dignity before God than another, that one person has more value than another, and any place where that is happening, including in slavery, is condemned by God in His Word. So, first, we all have equal dignity before God.

Second, we're equally submissive to God. You look at Paul's admonitions to slaves and masters for that matter, and to both slaves and master in the New Testament, He says, "Do what you do out of reverence for God, out of submission to God." I'll give you a list of verses: Colossians 3:22: *"Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."* You're submitting, ultimately, to God. Ephesians 6:5-9: *"Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ."* Colossians 4:1: *"Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."*

That's a key verse. That leads to the third reality. Not only do we have equal dignity before God and are equally submissive to God, but we will receive equal justice from God. God says through Paul in His Word to masters, "Don't forget, you've got a master." 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."* In other words, "Masters, you have a Master who will be just with you based on how you have treated the servants in your house, and slaves, the encouragement here is that though you may endure temporary injustice, there will indeed be eternal justice, guaranteed."

So, all of this is huge. Where the Bible may not be expressly prohibiting slavery it is undermining the very foundations of slavery. The reality is new heaven, new earth, heaven, there will be a day when we realize equal dignity before God, we're equally submissive to God, equally under His justice, and that's where slavery will be no more.

So, the Bible condemns slavery that undermines God's creation and condemns slavery that violates God's Word. This is where I want to show you that the Bible in clear, unequivocal terms speaks against slavery in specific, undeniable ways. Two in particular: one, the Bible denounces physical abuse all over Scripture, right? The Bible denounces physical abuse. Love one another. Don't hurt one another. Don't abuse one another, but specifically, when it comes to slavery. So, you've been in Leviticus. Go over to Exodus with me. Exodus 21. I want you to see God's law there applying to slavery and particularly when it comes to abuse.

Exodus 21. So, this is right after the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Then, God goes into additional laws for His people, and He gives these laws about slaves in Exodus 21. Look at verse 26 with me. There is so much here, we just don't have time to study it all, but look at verse 26-27. God says, talking about abuse of slaves, of servants: *"When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth."* In other words, if you hurt a slave, you lose a slave. It's not tolerable. You go back up, it's even more severe back up in verse 20: *"When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged."*

The key word here: avenged. When you see that, you realize when a man strikes a slave, and he dies...that slave dies...avenging justice will be the slave owner also dies. So, that the whole picture here is if a master strikes a slave, kills a slave, then the master will die...capital punishment here. So, the key is the Bible is very clearly denouncing physical abuse of any kind, among masters of servants or slaves, directly condemned by God.

This is not just physical abuse, but keep going here. The Bible also denounces human trafficking. You look up in verse 16. Human trafficking is, basically, the buying, selling,

stealing, bartering of people in slavery. It says in Exodus 21:16, *"Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death."* In other words, human trafficking is a capital crime in Scripture.

Okay, now come back to home base for a second. Go back to 1 Timothy with me; look back in 1 Timothy 1. We read over this pretty quickly when we were walking through the first part of 1 Timothy, but I want to take you back there so you can see where Paul has already addressed this kind of slavery in 1 Timothy 1. Look at 1 Timothy 1:8. We will get to it in verse 10, but see the set up. 1 Timothy 1:8 says,

*"Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane [he just goes down this list], for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality..."*

What's the last word? *"Enslavers..."* the word means literally "man stealers" or "slave dealers." Anyone who kidnaps people for sale is unholy, profane and is denying the gospel. So, I want you to see very clearly that the Bible condemns, denounces physical abuse and human trafficking. I want to emphasize that for two reasons. One, if these two truths about physical abuse and human trafficking from both testaments...Old Testament and New Testament alike...if these two truths had been embraced by Christians in the 18th and 19th century, slavery would never have existed like it did in the South. The Bible explicitly denounces and condemns the kind of slavery that took place in the Southern United States, and pastors and church members who used this Word to justify their practices were living in sin.

Paul clearly considered the kind of practices promoted in the African slave trade as abominable, a violation of God's Word and a denial of God's gospel. That's the first reason I wanted to make that clear. Second reason, and I want to make this clear, is because slavery like this...physical abuse and human trafficking...is not just a thing of the past. Slavery like this is happening around the world today. This is not just a part of history. They estimate...statistics estimate about 27 million slaves today. Human trafficking which includes buying, selling, trading, exploiting people for forced labor or for sex...human trafficking is the second largest and the fastest growing criminal industry in the world today.

Here's the statistics: Amid the millions of human trafficking victims in the world today, approximately 80% of them are women and girls, and half of them are minors. According to UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, over the past 30 years, over 30 million children have been sexually exploited through human trafficking. At this moment, literally, millions of children exist in the commercial sex trade. Examples: Over 100,000 Nepali girls as young as nine years old have been sold into India's red-light district over the last decade. Today, over 10,000 children between the ages of six and 14 live in brothels in Sri Lanka. Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises because it holds relatively low risk with high profit potential. Criminal organizations are increasingly attracted to human trafficking because, unlike drugs, humans can be sold repeatedly. According to our State Department, human trafficking is one of the greatest human rights challenges of this century, both in the United States and around the world.

So, I want us as a faith family to realize that this is a reality in the world, and I want you to see that the Bible condemns it, and, therefore, Bible-believing Christians should stand against it. Just as we could wish that our ancestors before us would have put this Word into action in their day, I want to call us to put it into action in our day. Brothers and sisters, this

is not something we need to insulate or isolate ourselves from. This is something the Bible speaks clearly on and as servants of this Word it is upon us to speak clearly as well. So, I want to put that before you and just ask the Holy Spirit lead and guide you, as a follower of Christ, to consider what that might look like for you. International Justice Mission, there are many other organizations, there are people who are doing things locally in Birmingham. I know members of the faith family are doing things locally in Birmingham, and then globally, but this is something we cannot ignore or pretend it's not there. The Bible clearly condemns slavery like this.

### **The Bible regulates slavery.**

Now, in other cases where these things are not happening...so, think indentured Hebrew servanthood or in some form of Roman slavery where people were voluntarily becoming servants and slaves, in those cases the Bible regulates slavery. So, just as we see the Bible regulating divorce, the Bible is regulating slavery. We've already seen some of this. We'll go through this pretty quickly and won't turn...you might write down some different places, but I want you to see how God does this in His Word. God mandates physical protection for slaves. We saw that in Exodus 21. Slaves abused by masters were immediately to be set free and compensated for their injuries. He requires financial provision for slaves. You go back to where we started in Leviticus 25, and you see that impoverished Hebrew servants who sold themselves to a master were to be provided for well. 2 Samuel 9:9-10 talks about economic rights of slaves including even the right to own other slaves. Financial provision.

God ensures, third, caring supervision of slaves. Leviticus 25, the last verse we read there, talked about how masters were not to rule over their servants ruthlessly but carefully. Exodus 20:10 talks about how God wanted all His people to enjoy the Sabbath and to thrive as followers of His. You see even some very close relationships between masters and servants in Genesis 15, 2 Kings 4, and 2 Kings 8. So, God ensures caring supervision of slaves, and then, finally, God promotes, and in some ways, guarantees eventual freedom from slavery.

So, we talked about briefly Leviticus 25, Exodus 21, Deuteronomy 15, that a Hebrew servant, a Hebrew slave, couldn't be held more than six years unless they chose to voluntarily remain in that picture, but every six years, all the slaves in Israel would be released in the seventh year. Not only would be released, but their debts would be released as well. So, someone could choose to stay in that state if they wanted to, if it was best for them and their family, but they did not have to in any way. God was providing specific ways out of slavery, and He even set up laws...we don't even have time to go into this side of things...He set up laws among His people to prevent people from falling into poverty that would lead into that kind of servanthood, whether it was leaving behind crops and food at harvest time for the poor to receive, so they would have some of the fruit of the land, and other things God would set up among His people to keep them out of poverty.

Deuteronomy 15, again, saying...God says, "I don't want poverty among you, and here's how to keep that cycle of poverty from ever developing among my people." All of this with a foretaste, obviously, of a day when there will be no more poverty and there will be no more picture of slavery, which is why in the New Testament...Paul in 1 Corinthians 7...encourages slaves who have an opportunity to become free...to become free. So, God promotes and, in some way, guarantees eventual freedom from slavery. In these ways, the Bible regulates slavery.

### **The Bible encourages slaves.**

Now, with that background, we then come to 1 Timothy 6:1-2 where the Bible encourages slaves. I hope that, in light of seeing what we have just seen, we have a little different



perspective on this passage. Now, we've not covered every single time that slavery is mentioned in the Bible by any means, but I hope we have seen different types of slavery, different pictures of slavery, the Bible addressing slavery, not as an original part of God's creation or God's ultimate desire, but a product of sin in a sinful world.

So Paul, knowing that Ephesus...the church where you have slaves and masters sitting right next to one other in the gathering of God's people, he speaks to slaves in particular. We're not diving into the passages in depth where he speaks to masters, but here he speaks to slaves in particular, and he encourages them in two ways. One, he encourages them to honor their unbelieving masters. In verse one, he is talking about unbelieving slaves with unbelieving masters, and in verse two, he is talking about slaves with believing masters. He says in verse one, "...regard your masters as worthy of all honor..." It's a word we have seen him use over the last couple of weeks when he talks about honoring one another in the family of God, honoring widows, honoring elders, now honor masters...respect them. Based on the same things we've already talked about, based on the fact that they have dignity before God, and they will receive justice from God.

So, listen to what he says. He says, "*Honor them so that...*" Here's the purpose. "Paul, so why should I, as a slave, honor an unbelieving master, maybe even an unjust master?" Paul says so that...Here's why, "*So that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.*" "Do this," Paul says, "for two reasons." One, for the glory of God. This is what drives Paul. All over the New Testament, all over 1 Timothy, he has already told us in 1 Timothy 2, "*Pray in this way because it pleases God.*" In chapter three he says, "Elders lead this way in order to not bring reproach upon God." In 1 Timothy 5, he said, "Care for widows in order to please God, in order to not bring reproach from a sinful world upon God." So, he says, "*Do this for the glory of God.*" Paul's deepest concern is the glory of God among slaves; that's what's driving him here. He wants unbelieving masters to look at Christian slaves and see the mercy and the goodness and the love and the glory of God.

This is the place where we might even pause for a second. Yes, this is absolutely addressing slavery here, but I can't help to also think about people in this room who have unbelieving employers; students in this room who have unbelieving teachers. Scripture is most definitely calling you, with an unbelieving employer or an unbelieving teacher, to honor your employer or teacher, to respect them, so that when they see you, they see a picture of the goodness and the love and the mercy and the glory of God. To realize that...student, every assignment you turn in as a follower of Christ, is ultimately intended to be a reflection of the glory of your God. That man or woman, every project you work on, every e-mail you send, every meeting you sit in on as a follower of Christ, is intended to be a reflection on the glory of God. For those of you who have unbelieving, non-Christian employers, show a picture of the goodness and the mercy and the glory of God to them even when it is not easy.

That's what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:18-20. He said, "*Servants be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.*" I won't ask for a show of hands among those who might think your employer is sometimes unreasonable, but Peter says, "*Be submissive, even then, for this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly for what credit is there when you sin and are harshly treated you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.*" May everything you do this week before a non-believing teacher or employer be done by the grace of God for the glory of God. Paul says, "Slaves, don't defame God before unbelieving masters. Show them the glory of God in the way you honor them." Then, he says, "Do that for the glory of God and for the advancement of the gospel."

This is what Paul says in Titus 2:9-10. He says, "...*be subject to your masters in everything so that you may adorn the doctrine of God in every respect.*" What a great phrase..."*let your work be an adornment of the gospel.*" Honor unbelieving masters through hard work; honor unbelieving teachers, employers through hard work for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel. This is where we realize...this is huge...the very fact that Paul is speaking like this in 1 Timothy 6 shows us that Christianity is not primarily aimed at social reform. If the purpose of Christianity is ultimately to change societal structures, then we wouldn't expect Paul to talk like this. We would expect Paul to exhort them to work against the system of slavery.

Instead Paul says...now keep in mind, he has already clearly denounced slave trafficking; that's not what he is talking about here. He says, "Here, live for the salvation of your masters because Christianity is not primarily about social reform. Christianity is aimed primarily at personal redemption." When people are redeemed, that begins to change social structures, and this is how the Bible primarily addresses slavery—by aiming for personal redemption, personal transformation. You think about it. The more people come to Christ...are grafted into a community of faith where they are brothers, neither slave nor free, Jew or Gentile...they are together loving one another, caring for one another, supporting one another, serving one another. The more that is happening, the more hearts are being transformed that way, the more the foundations of Roman slavery were being undercut. "In a way," one author says, "the gospel lays the explosive charge that ultimately leads to detonation and destruction of slavery."

So, honor unbelieving masters for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel, because even unbelieving, unjust masters need the love and the mercy and the goodness and the glory of God made known to them, especially unbelieving masters, especially unbelieving employers need that.

Then, he says, "Respect believing masters." Apparently, part of what was happening here in Ephesus was you had Christian servants...slaves...of Christian masters who were saying, "Well, because my master is a Christian, I'm going to slack off. I'm not going to work as hard. I'm not going to respect them the same because well, they are my brother or sister in Christ." Paul says, "No, all the more because they are your brother or sister in Christ, all the more work hard in your service to them."

So, similarly, just to continue making the parallel, if your employer is a follower of Christ, then do not think, "Okay, well I can get away with things I couldn't get away with because they are a brother or sister in Christ. I mean, we're in the same church, of course they will cut me some slack on this." Paul says, "Have nothing to do with that kind of thinking."

If you are a student...say you are a ninth grader, and your teacher is sitting in this room as a part of this church, do not even think that you can turn your assignment in late; that you can say, "Well, I was listening to this long sermon from David Platt, and so I couldn't get it in on time." The Bible expressly forbids that kind of thinking. All the more, if you have a believing employer, a Christian employer or Christian teacher, to work hard, to serve well. He says work wholeheartedly; don't slack off. Work wholeheartedly. To do otherwise would be an unbiblical, un-Christian approach to the workplace. Also, serve selflessly. This is your brother or sister in Christ. Serve them well. Paul says serve, honor them all the more, because they are your brother or sister in Christ.

### **The Bible redeems slavery.**

So, in these ways, the Bible encourages slaves. Ultimately...don't miss this...ultimately, the Bible redeems slavery, meaning God takes, like He does so many other things, a product of sin like slavery in the world, and He turns it into a picture of God's goodness toward His people.

Now, we realize the beauty of Christ, the gospel reality. Brothers and sisters, our Master, our God, our King, our Lord, our Master has become our servant. Paul says in Philippians 2, *"...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant..."* The same word that is used for servant there is "*doulos*", is the same word that is used for slave here in 1 Timothy 6:1. Christ became our Savior by becoming a slave. You remember, even when we think about the Lord's Supper in John 13, and that time with His disciples when Jesus took off His outer garment, wrapped it around His waist and knelt down and began to wash His disciples' feet. Slave. Serving them. He said to His disciples in Mark 10:45, *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus did not come to be served by us but to serve us. What glorious reality that the God of the universe...just let it soak in...that the God of the universe, the Creator of the world, the Sovereign rule and reign over all things, God has stooped to become your servant, to become your slave. You say, "Isn't that too strong a statement to describe God?"

He took on a robe of human flesh and took all of your sinful filth, guilt and shame upon Himself. He went to the cross, and He paid the price. He stood in your place as your servant, so that you could be redeemed. This word "redeemed" is a picture of slavery. When we talk about redemption, redemption is to buy something, to pay a redemption price.

You and I were slaves to sin. Jesus said in John 8:34, *"...everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."* We were slaves to sin. Romans 6:11 says, *"We were slaves to sin, impurity and wickedness."* *"The snare of the devil,"* 2 Timothy 2:26 says, *"had captured us to do his will."* *"Living,"* 1 John 5:19 says, *"in the world that lies in the power of the evil one."* We were in his grasp, and Christ our God came, and He set us free. He paid the price with His life, with His death on the cross, with His resurrection from the grave, so that you could be set free from sin and become a son, a daughter of God. That's good news!

Our Master has become our servant. So, for anyone in the room today who has been walking in slavery to sin, who has been running as a rebel from God, know this: God has stooped to serve you anyway, and He has sent His Son to die on the cross for your sins, so that in trusting Him, in trusting the service He has given to you, you might be saved, and not just...Christian, this is not something He did 2,000 years ago. When you woke up this morning, He is serving you with breath, and He's serving you with everything you need today. He is supplying all your needs. He is your constant servant. What an amazing truth! Glorious reality! Breathtaking realization that moment by moment by moment...at this moment...Christ is serving you. He is feeding, nourishing your heart with His Word. That when you wake up tomorrow morning, He is there to nourish and serve and equip and empower you all week long.

Our Master has become our servant, so that now the essence of Christianity, we realize...we gladly become His slave. We gladly become His slave. When Paul was looking for a word to describe himself at the beginning of Romans 1, he says, "Paul, a slave of Christ. This is who I am. I belong to another. I am under the authority of another. I work for another. I work for the glory of another. This is what it means to be a Christian. It means we belong to another, we are His slaves."

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