

**Ephesians 6: 5-8; “Bondservants, Be Obedient”, Message # 53 in a series
entitled – “The Greatness of His Power”, a Bible Study prepared
by Pastor Paul Rendall for May 1st, 2024.**

Having addressed the obedience which children should render to their parents in verses 1-3 of this chapter, and then having given instruction to fathers, that they should not provoke their children to wrath in their expectations of their obedience, the apostle now has specific instructions concerning masters and servants. Paul tells bondservants that the Lord expects them to do 3 things which will help in every way to promote a right view of service to Christ in the minds of everyone around them, in families, in churches, and in the greater society. 1st – Be obedient to their masters with fear and trembling in sincerity of heart. 2nd – Remember that the bondservants mentioned here are Christ’s bondservants, doing the will of God from their hearts. And 3rd – And these bondservants do their service with goodwill as to the Lord, and not unto men. Let’s attempt to learn more about this very interesting subject, in relation to our service to Christ.

1st – Servants are to be obedient to their masters with fear and trembling in sincerity of heart. (verse 5)

Ephesians 6: 5 – “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ.” Concerning the word “servant” or “bondservants” in verse 5, the word is δουλοι in the Greek, which means a slave, literally or figuratively, involuntarily or voluntarily, frequently used in a qualified sense of subjection or subserviency, Strong’s Concordance says. Albert Barnes, the Commentator says – “The word “servants” or “bondservants” denotes one who is bound to render service to another, whether that service be free or voluntary, and may denote, therefore, either a slave, or one who binds himself to render service to another.” He goes on to say – “It cannot be demonstrated that the word here necessarily means “slaves”; though, if slavery existed among those to whom this Epistle was written – as there can be no doubt that it did – it is a word which would apply to those in this condition.”

What is required of slaves, or servants? Paul says here, it is that they would be obedient to their masters according to the flesh. And this statement is further elaborated on, by Paul’s saying “with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as unto Christ”. These expressions almost seem to imply that every master had the right to punish their slaves and to treat them harshly, or cruelly, because the master knew that their very life was in his hands. No doubt in some cases some masters acted in this way. In many nations and states this was the civil right of their free citizens. The expression fear and trembling, I think means that the servant would show great humility and respect to their master, and that they would give honor to them, they would be careful not to offend them, but most of all, that their obedience would be rendered as unto Christ, and not simply to the master.

How are all of us to obey Christ and keep His commandments? It says here – With sincerity of heart. Or singleness of heart. This was same attitude which was to characterize the servant or slave. Albert Barnes says – “It was not the design of the Christian religion to produce a rude sundering of the ties which bind man to man, but to teach all to perform their duties aright in the relation in which Christianity found them, and gradually to modify the customs of society, and to produce ultimately the universal prevalence of that which is right.” The proof that this was true is found over in 1st Corinthians 7, verses 20-24.

“Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.” “Were you called while a slave?” “Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.” “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.” “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.” “Brethren, let each one remain in that state in which he was called.” These are very straightforward words. What we find Paul saying here is that if you were called while a slave, you should not be concerned about it! In other words, what Paul was saying in that day of the Roman Empire and its many slaves, you should not go about to try to overthrow the institution of slavery. People in our day find it hard to believe that slavery as an

institution is as old as the Bible. And indeed, that there were many laws governing the holding and treatment of slaves, found in the Old Testament law which was given to Israel. Indeed, we do not find an outright condemnation of slavery in the Bible.

What we do find, that is patently wrong, and should be considered by all of us as sinful, is men stealing and kidnapping of people in order to make them slaves. This truth is found in 1st Timothy 1: 9-11. “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of father and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.”

The word “men-stealers” in the Greek is Ανδραποδισταῖς (Andrapodistais) means “slave-dealers; whether those who carry on the traffic in human flesh and blood; or those who steal a person in order to sell him into bondage; or those who buy such stolen men or women, no matter of what color or country; or those who sow dissensions among barbarous tribes in order that they who are taken in war may be sold into slavery; or the nations who legalize or connive at such traffic: all these are men-stealers, and God classes them with the worst of mortals.” (Adam Clarke) This indeed is an out and out sin in God’s sight.

But we must come to terms with what has been introduced to us in 1st Corinthians 7: 21-24. What is legitimate in God’s sight in relation to the whole idea of slavery? Does God approve of it? The answer is, in a holy sense of service to God and to Christ, He does. This is why Paul says that if a person was called while they were a slave, they were not to worry about it. In that condition, they can certainly still serve Christ. The one who is called while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. And likewise, he who is called while free is Christ’s slave. Therefore, whichever category that you found yourself in, whether you were slave or free, you were to glorify God by service to Him.

It is interesting to see this same kind of language in 1st Corinthians 6: 19 and 20 that we have just read in 1st Corinthians 7: 23. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s. In other words, when Christ redeemed you to God, He purchased you, He bought you with the price of His precious blood, out of the state of slavery to sin. Once freed from sin, whether you were are a slave or a freedman in the flesh, you were to glorify God in the situation that you found yourself in. We are now slaves to God.

This has everything to do with our not being under law, but being under grace. It has everything to do with our being able to live a joyful Christian life no matter what state we are in; whether slave or free. Look with me over at Romans 6: 15-22. “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” So here we find the truth of the matter.

Before we came to Christ, before He saved us, we were presenting our members slaves to uncleanness and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness. We were slaves of sin, and we were free in regard to righteousness. Now that we have come to Christ we are now ashamed of the things that we once did, knowing that the end of these things is death. But when we were born again we were

set free from sin, and we immediately began to rejoice in the thought that we had become slaves of God and righteousness. Having become slaves to God, we have our fruit to holiness. We are separated unto God's service. And by learning to practice righteousness, we bear fruit unto God. The fruit of the Spirit in our attitudes and actions. The fruit of righteousness is found in our doing good works. And there is fruit in our Christian influence upon other Christians and our witness to people around us who do not know the Lord.

2nd – Remember that bondservants mentioned here are Christ's bondservants, doing the will of God from their hearts.

Verse 6 – “Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” The phrase, “doing the will of God from the heart”, is very key here. For slavery or servitude without a heart of love and the desire to be faithful to the master, our Lord Jesus Christ, will not make the difference that God is looking for. It is the attitude which is full of longing to do God's will from a cheerful heart of love to Christ; that is a state that can be rejoiced over, by both master and servant. So the bondservant must see himself as a bondservant of Christ doing the will of God. There were servants in the Old Testament times who truly loved their master, and who wanted to serve him permanently, and never leave his service.

Look with me over at Exodus, chapter 21, verses 1-6. “Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.”

The ESV says in verse 6, “and he shall be his slave forever”. Now, this is a very precious passage for Hebrew servants. If they were bought, they would serve six years and in the seventh year they would go out free and pay nothing. Husband and wife together, if they came in together. But, if the servant made it plain, saying that he loved his master and his wife and his children, and he said that he would not go out free, then his master would bring him to the judges and he would then bring him to the door or doorpost, probably of the master's house. And this amazing ceremony was performed: His master would take an awl and bore his ear through. It appears that he would bore through his ear and secure it to the wood of the doorpost.

In this way he was saying that he would not go out from his master's house to serve anyone else, because he loved his master. John Gill says – “The ear is an hieroglyphic of obedience, and the boring of it through to the doorpost denotes the strict and close obedience of such a servant to his master, and how he is, and ought to be, addicted to his service, and be constantly employed in it, and never stir from it, nor so much as go over the threshold of his master's house.” The thing that the Lord would have us to see from this amazing passage is whether we are willing to publicly say that we love our Lord's service and that we are unwilling to go out from it?

If this is the case, we will come to the door of the Lord's house and make a public commitment to Him in the presence of all the Lord's people saying that we will serve Him forever. This is what is done in baptism and becoming a member of the church. We are committed to doing the will of the Lord from our heart. This means that our primary allegiance to living our Christian life is to Christ Himself. We will not live our life simply trying to please other men, even other Christians. It is possible that some men, even Christian men, that they will try to make us their slaves or servants. But our Master is Christ.

Our Lord Jesus addressed the scribes and the Pharisees in regard to their problem of simply trying to please men. In Matthew 23: 5-11 Jesus says this: (Reading from the King James) “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and

greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” These words of Christ show us how it is possible for religious men who do not know Christ, to come to be wrongly thinking too much about being seen by men as very religious and great in their supposed spirituality.

They think that true religion consists in pleasing men or impressing other men by their works and the things that they wear. They take delight in trying to take the greatest seats in the synagogues, or holding a high position in the church. They like to have other men think of them as someone great. But we as Christians will have an altogether different mindset, if we are wise. We will see Christ as our Master, and we will have a humble and fervent love for all of the brethren.

3rd – These bondservants do their service with goodwill as to the Lord, and not unto men.

Verses 7 & 8 say – “With goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.” And so we should ask ourselves whether we have good-will towards those whom God has called us to serve, or those whom He has appointed over us. In all of our service to others, He has called us to serve Him first of all. And so, seeing what the will of God was for Him, He made Himself of no reputation, He took upon Himself the form of a bondservant, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name above every name, it says in Philippians 2: 7-9.

There is our Master setting the example for us. He was the ultimate profitable servant, both on behalf of God and man. Let’s look at Luke 17: verses 7-10 to see what our attitude and actions ought to be like as servants of Christ. “And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’ “But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?’ “Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him?” “I think not.” “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

So, the servant here is plowing or tending sheep for his master. He is out in the field doing his master’s assigned work for him. When he comes in from the field after working all day, will his master say to him: Come at once and sit down to eat? No, the master will said to him – Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward, then, you will eat and drink? No, the servant will still be thinking of his master’s needs and desires and not more of his own, even after he has worked all day for him. This is not because he is required to think this way because he is a servant. No, he loves his Master, and wants to serve Him and delight in doing His will.

The Christian, even if he is doing all of those things which His Lord, His Master, has commanded him to do, he will take the attitude that he is still an unprofitable servant. He is only doing that which he was commanded to do. But at the end of his life, he will have lived in such a way that the Lord Jesus will say to him – Well, done you good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter in to the joy of your Lord.