



Slaves and Masters

Series: The Grand Plan of the Glorious God

Ephesians 6:5-9

November 21, 2010

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Introduction

Paul is unwavering in his assertion that the gospel of Jesus Christ, received by regenerate and repentant hearts, births a faith that transforms the whole of our lives. That has been the thrust of the message that we have seen throughout this section. The gospel applied revolutionizes our personal conduct our marriages and our homes. Now, he moves to the application of the gospel as regards the relationship between slaves and masters. And since we do have slavery in this sense in our culture, this needs a little explanation.

Slavery in the Roman Empire, in the time of Paul, was extremely widespread. Nearly every home had slaves. Scholars have estimated that there were anywhere between 15-60 million slaves at any one time in the Roman Empire. They did all of the work. Not only did they do the hard physical labor that was necessary for the Empire to operate but they were the doctors, teachers, business managers, architects, entertainers, even many of the closest advisors to Caesar were slaves.

There was a great range in the treatment and care for the slaves in the Empire. Some were treated well and cared for and others were mistreated and abused. Some were granted their freedom after a certain period of slavery and others were slaves until the day that they died. Make no mistake, however, the slaves' life was not his own. Culturally, the slave was viewed as not as a person, but as a thing. Aristotle centuries before explained how the slave was to be viewed. The slave, Aristotle said, was "a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." The master possessed the power of life and death over the slave. Slaves could be inherited in Roman law. They could be purchased and sold. They could be taken because of debt and, of course, many slaves were slaves because they were prisoners of war. When a war would be waged in the Roman world and some non-Roman population would be conquered, many of their number would be taken into domestic slavery.

Slavery was a part of life. Nowhere will you find someone questioning whether slavery was morally unprincipled or wrong. But the fact that the Apostle Paul is addressing the issue of masters and slaves here is clear indication that they were an accepted part of the church.

There were numerous slaves that were part of the church in Ephesus and around the Roman world and the Apostle Paul treats them with dignity by addressing them directly in the context of this letter.

Often, one of the questions that is asked is why Paul does not condemn slavery here. Why doesn't he vilify slavery and slave-owners? I think the answer is found in this – Paul's handling of the issue of slavery illustrates the means by which society is most effectively transformed. Rather than creating a political or social movement to overturn slavery and end injustice and attach the gospel to it to give it some sort of legitimacy, Paul instead seeks to overturn culture through gospel transformation.

He preaches the gospel and calls people to repent and trust Christ and as he does and as people are saved and lives are realigned in light of Christ's atoning sacrifice, real change in society takes place. The truth is that every place where the gospel message has penetrated, and the Spirit of God has moved, slavery and the abuse of slaves has disappeared.

Well, how does this apply to us? We're not slaves. We don't have slavery in our culture but this text has much to say to us, not only in the area of our gospel responsibilities as employers and employees, but this text has some application to submission to authority on every level. It has application for how we handle authority and submission in every arena: not only work but ministry involvement in the church, teachers and students, athletes and coaches, neighborhood associations, police, government, etc. But even more, this text has something to say to us, first, about our relationship to Christ. So let's look at this text and let's see first the call to

1) Serve Your Earthly Masters In Light of Your Slavery to Christ (v. 5-8) It is important to notice immediately that the foundation of the gospel responsibilities that Paul is going to lay out for us in this section find their definition, they get their meaning and take their shape, from a right understanding of our slavery to Christ. Paul roots this instruction; he develops his application, not in the order and principles of Creation, as he did with marriage and family, but based upon our slavery to Christ. Slaves, obey as you would Christ, as slaves of Christ, that is the literal translation – slave not servant. It is the Greek word –doulos – slave. At the root of what Paul has to say to us is the biblical truth that we are the slaves of Christ.

We are slaves of Christ. What does this mean? Well, the truth is, this is not a common appellation, not a common designation, that we use to describe our relationship to Jesus Christ. We like to use such titles as child of God, member of the body of Christ, bride of Christ, heirs and joint-heirs with Christ, sheep, royal priesthood, holy nation, chosen people – those are all good, biblical titles. But the truth is that the fundamental designation, the fundamental reality of what it means for us to be a Christian is that we are slaves of Christ.

Let me ask you a question. What is the fundamental confession of our faith? What is the fundamental declaration that we make that distinguishes our relationship to Jesus Christ? I'll give you a hint. It is three words. We confess them together at baptism. What is it? Jesus is Lord! That is the fundamental declaration of our faith. To be saved, Romans 10:9, we must confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. (Rom 10:9) That word for Lord is the word kurios. Kurios is a term of reverence. It is a term that means master, the one who is the possessor and disposer of things, the one who has the right to command, the one who has control over a person or thing, the one who has the right to decide. Obviously when applied to Jesus Christ, the title kurios means master over all, sovereign Lord, possessor of heaven and earth and all that is in it, the one who has the right to command all things. But beloved there is not such thing as a Lord without subjects, no such thing as a master without slaves. No Lord, kurios, without a slave, doulos.

And that is what we are, Christ's slaves (1Co 6:19-20) You were ransomed from the slave market of sin not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19). Jesus has purchased you if you are a Christian. Jesus owns you if you are a Christian. When you declare "Jesus is Lord," you are declaring that you are the slave of Christ. There is no other way to view it. A slave is someone whose life belongs totally to someone else, absolute ownership, absolute control, absolute obedience, absolute loyalty, absolute dependence. A slave lived to serve his master. He had no will of his own. If Christ is our Lord we are His slaves. He has the right of command over us. That explains Christ's response to the practice of those who paid him lip service only: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? (Luk 6:46) It just cannot be.

Do you see, Paul is not calling us to become slaves of Christ, it is already what we are if we are Christians. Can I tell you, none of the disciples or writers of Scripture had any problem calling themselves slaves. Peter, John, James, Jude – all refer to themselves as the slave of God or the slave of Christ. It is obscured in our English translations, but the words translated as servant or bondservant are in reality this word "doulos" – slave. The Apostle Paul, knew what it was to be a slave to Christ. It was one of his favorite ways of describing himself. He was a doulos of Christ and a doulos had no life of his own, no will of his own, no purpose of his own and no plan of his own. All was subject to his master. The slave's every thought, breath, and effort was subject to the will of his master. In sum, the picture of a slave is one who is absolutely surrendered and totally devoted to his master. Paul was not his own, he had been bought with a price, the blood of Jesus Christ, he had been the recipient of inconceivable grace and so He viewed himself as the property of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His slave exclusively. Paul lived always with the awareness that God in Christ had delivered him out of the miry clay of sin and put his feet upon the rock of righteousness and put a new song in his heart and he was committed to being the slave of Christ with all that was in him. Paul was bound to Christ.

By calling themselves slaves, these brothers, these disciples and apostles were saying in effect: "I am a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ, I am absolutely sold out to His will. I am willing to do whatever he tells me to do. I am will to say what ever he tells me to say, I am willing to go wherever he leads me, I find my greatest joy in being faithfully surrendered to Jesus Christ. I have no rights, only the privilege of being chosen to be your slave." In that sense, every true believer is a doulos of God. Every real Christian is a doulos of God.

It is so vitally important that we do not lose sight of this fact. You are, in every sense, a slave of God, a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have been purchased out of the slave market, you have been redeemed with an inestimable price, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. You have been purchased by a Master, by a Lord, who is the greatest and most loving, benevolent, gracious, generous, kind, compassionate, caring, providing Master of all...but He is still Master. For that reason, all that we do must be done with this in mind: How will this bring glory to him? How will it bring honor to Him? How will it enable me to serve Him? We live to bring honor to the one who purchased us. We have been bought in order that we might be slaves of righteousness and slaves of God and of Christ.

Now here's the deal, as the picture of the way in which slaves are to serve their masters, Paul illustrates four particular ways that we are to serve Christ. His message here is something like this: "Just as you serve Christ in these ways, so in a similar way you should serve your earthly masters."

How we are to serve Christ our Master. With fear and trembling...that is with reverence and with a deep sense of humility, desiring to give honor to him, careful not offend Him but desiring that He would be fully pleased.

With a sincere heart...not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart...a sincere heart is one that is singular in purpose, not filled with mixed motives. Not trying to get glory for ourselves and attention for ourselves but all glory to Christ. If we say that Jesus is our Lord and our Savior, then everything in our lives should demonstrate that fact. No more serving two masters, no more trying to walk two roads, no more separating our private and public lives, secular and sacred. This is the great failure of a divided heart. One minute we are serving God and the next we are serving our own interests. This kind of living will only succeed in pulling our life apart. If we aim purely and only at the glory of God, seek his honor and favor, and direct everything we do and say by His Word, then we have integrity -- singleness of purpose. Even more, this sincerity of heart carries with it the idea of generosity -- of going above and beyond the commands -- not just the letter but the Spirit of the Word of God.

With good will...We serve Christ with good will that is with joy, with gladness, with joyful obedience. (1Jn 5:3)

With the expectation of glorious reward... knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord...We serve Christ with the expectation of his faithful and righteous reward. Ultimately the reward of eternal life and heaven – full communion, everlasting blessedness and joy beyond measure in the presence of our God and King.

Paul picks these four expressions of our service to Christ to illustrate the way that slaves are to serve their masters, but what is the application to us? The first and obvious application is to our vocation, to the service that we render to our bosses. How does this work? Well, think of it like this. If you have seen the pictures that Shannon Maggi has taken of some of the families in our church, you know that one of the really cool things she does is to do a picture of the family where the kids are closer to here and just slightly out of focus and the parents, the source of those kids, are behind them and in perfect, sharp focus. That is the way that slaves or employees are to serve their employers. The employers are like the kids in the photo, they are closest to you, as the employee – they are your immediate master, but behind them, their source, is the Lord Jesus Christ standing there in perfect focus. So the idea is that we serve our employers with an eye that goes beyond them to our true Lord for whose sake we truly serve and work. This is where the Christian work ethic comes from. So what will that look like in the context of our work?

How does our obedience to Christ transfer to our obedience to our earthly masters?

It looks like this. We will serve our employers with respect, granting them honor that is consistent with the way in which we honor Christ. Now we do not submit to them with the absolute submission that is reserved for Christ, but to the degree that they command us to do anything that is not sinful, we should do it. You should be obedient to your employer doing what he demands of you with thanksgiving that you have a job. You should do your job well, with singleness of purpose and with the desire to go above and beyond. You don't do shoddy work. You do excellent work as you would serve Christ with excellence. You give it your all with undivided attention and effort. You work 60 minutes for an hour's pay. You don't waste time on the job.

Paul specifically talks about serving not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ. What he is getting at is those people who have the proximity alarm that goes off when the boss is around and they work really hard to show they deserve that promotion but who slack off when he gets out of sight. Or it is falsely flattering the boss or playing office politics. Let me just say that if we suck up to the boss or we work more diligently to impress when the boss is around and slack off if we know no one is watching, we forget that

we are slaves of Christ first and nothing ever escapes his attention – insincerity or hypocrisy and laziness. You should do your job with good will – that implies that you do your job having an enthusiastic, joyful and positive attitude. How easy it is to fall into the cycle of complaint about the boss or your pay or the lousy benefits...fill in the blank.

And we do all of our labor with an eye to the reward that comes from Christ – whatever it may be – whether it is a promotion or a raise, or the blessing of keeping your job, simply the honor of shining as a light for Christ where you work with no other expectation except hearing at the end of your faithfulness – “Well done, good and faithful slave. Enter into the joy of your Master.”

But Paul does not stop with the slaves, he has words for the masters as well and the heart of what Paul is saying is this:

2) Masters, Be Mastered By Christ as You Exercise Authority (v. 9). The message of Paul to the Christian masters at the church in Ephesus was fairly simple: be mastered by Christ as you exercise authority over your slaves – be a master to them as Christ is to you. When he says to the Christian masters, “do the same to them,” he is referring to the instructions that he has just given to the slaves. He is not talking about service and obedience, but he is talking about a sense of graciousness, of benevolence and kindness, of treating slaves with dignity and respect, honesty and integrity, treating them as they would want to be treated by their master if they were a slave. As a Christian master, it would involve such things as praying for them, speaking the truth to them, caring for their physical needs and seeing to it that they are well rewarded for the work that they do. Christian masters were to be reasonable, conscientious, just toward their servants, and to remember that they were responsible to God. Moreover, he tells them to stop their threatening. His point is this. Threatening seeks to produce obedience by producing fear. Christian leadership seeks to motivate service through grace and gratitude.

The application to the employee-employer relationship is, I think, quite obvious. Christian employers ought to treat their employees with respect. You should treat those who work for you justly and fairly. You should be fair, reasonable and understanding, not demeaning them or threatening them with being fired all the time but setting the example of hard work, integrity, commitment and joyful labor. You should pay your people what they are worth and not what you can get away with and if they have needs that you can help them, do it and in so doing shine a light in the gospel of Christ. You should have a sincere concern for their well-being, for their health and for their spiritual condition. Give them the time off that they need. Take an interest in their homes and in their lives. As a Christian employer, you have been granted by God a place of shepherding concern over your employees, take care of them as much as you can. Make the workplace a safe and enjoyable place to work. Praise what is praiseworthy, give credit where credit is due, and rightly correct where correction is needed. As a Christian

employer, your devotion to Christ and the reality of your faith ought to be on display at all times. You do what is right and you expect what is right because you are first and foremost a slave to your master which is Christ.

3) The Principles Behind the Slave/Master Relationship Apply to All Relationships Involving Authority. If you are a Christian, in every realm that you exercise authority, you do so as a representative of Christ, as one who is under the authority of Christ and as one who is to reflect Christ in the way that you lead. And if you a Christian, in every area in which you are in a place of submission, you are to serve those who are leading you in a manner that demonstrates your ultimate submission to Jesus Christ.

Ministry context...teacher and student...coaches and athletes...administrator...project leader... foreman...etc. The application is endless.

4) The Clear Conclusion of this Section is That All of Life is to Be Lived Under the Conscious Lordship of Christ.

Do you see the overall thrust of what Paul has been teaching? All of our lives are to be lived under the conscious and deliberate Lordship of Jesus Christ. That means that our faith must be integrated into every area of our lives. There is not secular sacred split. You can't miss it: as a believer, your relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord is the primary, governing fact of life. Every believer should live every day with the focus, "I worship Christ. I am no longer my own. I belong to Christ as my Lord. I must do His will. I must live to please Him. Someday I will stand before Him to receive the reward for my faithful obedience." Christ must be at the center of all that we think and do. What Paul has been describing for us throughout this section of application of the gospel to our lives is the life of a person who lives out the Gospel, for whom the Gospel has penetrated each aspect of their lives.

It brings to mind the words of Jesus: (Mat 7:21-27) What has been the underlying truth all along comes very clearly to the forefront now. If we would live under the Lordship of Christ in every area of our lives, if we would submit to Christ's Lordship in our personal living, in our marriages, in our child raising, in our places of work or any context that requires our selfless leadership or humble submission, we need a new nature. We need a new heart. We need a new power for living. We need someone to transform us and deliver us from our rebelliousness that deserves wrath and the judgment of God. We need the gospel.

I am calling on you today to live out the full implications of Christ's Lordship and your slavery to him.

I am calling on you to call out to God that the implications of the gospel would be fully formed in every area of your life.

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