

## **Masters And Slaves**

6:5-9

- Paul has given instructions to husbands and wives and to parents and children. (Eph. 5:22-6:4).
- He now proceeds to give instructions to masters and slaves.
- Slavery was very common in the Roman Empire, and there were literally millions of slaves. Some estimate there were as many as 60 million slaves.
- Usually a slave was not regarded as a person, but as a thing.
- Some of these slaves had become Christians.
- Most slaves had a non-Christian master, but some had a Christian master.
- The institution of slavery was legal, and the master had the power of life and death over the slave.
- Roman citizens felt it was beneath their dignity to work, and most work was done by slaves.

### **EPH 6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;**

- “Slaves” is from “doulos” [**do**o lahs] meaning “slave, bondservant.”
  - “Masters” is from “kurios” [**koo** ree ahs] meaning “lord, master.”
1. “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh”
    - a. These Christian slaves, being addressed, were slaves either to a Christian or a non-Christian master.
    - b. Coming to Christ did not mean one was freed from the bondage of slavery.
    - c. If it did, it would serve as a wrong motivation to become a Christian. Slaves would eagerly seek to be Christians to free them from the yoke of slavery rather than a love for God and His word.
  2. “with fear and trembling” - 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 2:12.
    - a. These words were applicable to their earthly masters who had the power of life and death.
    - b. They were especially applicable to their heavenly Master who has absolute authority.
  3. “in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ”
    - a. “sincerity” is “huplotes” [hoop **lah** tays] “without divided loyalties, singleness, sincerity.”
    - b. Christianity is a heart religion - not something merely external.

c. They were to be faithful and obedient slaves.

**EPH 6:6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.**

1. “not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers” - They were not to work only when the master’s eyes were on them.
2. “but as slaves of Christ” - They should recognize they were really slaves of Christ and should be seeking to please Him. The Lord was pleased when they rendered faithful service to their earthly masters.
3. “doing the will of God from the heart” - They were to wholeheartedly do the will of God.
  - a. It was not external service, but was to come from the heart.
  - b. When things are done from the heart they are easier.
4. The Christian slave was not to be lazy or to work merely because he was forced to work.

**EPH 6:7 With good will [or with heartiness] render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,**

1. “With good will render service, as to the Lord” - They should understand when they render service to their earthly master they were pleasing the heavenly Master.
  - a. This should motivate “good will” service.
  - b. The word is “eunoia” [yoo noi ah] meaning “good will.” It can also have the idea of “heartiness.” (Eph. 6:7).
2. “and not to men” - They were really working for the Lord - not just for men.

**EPH 6:8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.**

1. “knowing that whatever good thing each one does this he will receive back from the Lord” - He will be repaid by the Lord for every task and deed done. The Lord was fully aware of their plight and conduct.
2. “whether slave or free” - This promise is for all whether he/she is a slave or freeman.

**EPH 6:9 And, [Christian] masters, do the same things [apply Christian principles] to them [slaves], and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality [favoritism, respect of persons] with Him.**

1. “And, masters, do the same things to them” - 1 Tim. 6:1,2; Col. 4:1
  - a. “masters” is not a reference to employers as some have suggested, but to literal slave owners.
  - b. These are Christian masters who are warned not to mistreat their slaves.
  - c. They were not required to set the slaves free, but they were to treat them right.
  - d. Some masters were very harsh and did horrible things to their slaves.
  - e. The inference is that some of them were guilty of doing such things.

- f. There would be no need for these instructions if the Christian master were always treating their slaves fairly.
2. “and give up threatening” - It was common to threaten and beat slaves to keep them in line and intimidated.
  - a. Christian masters were not to treat their slaves in this evil manner.
  - b. Applying Christian principles to the way they treated slaves would not permit such evil behavior.
3. “knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven”
  - a. Earthly masters should keep in mind they were fully accountable to the heavenly Master.
  - b. The Lord would not hesitate to punish those who abused their power and authority over the slaves.
4. “and there is no partiality with Him. -
  - a. The Lord would not show any favoritism because one was a master or a slave.
  - b. They would be judged according to their actions. (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12).

### **Additional Scriptures About Christian Slaves And Masters**

**1TI 6:1 Let all [Christians] who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own [personal] masters as worthy of all honor [full respect] so that the name of God and our doctrine [teaching, the gospel] may not be spoken against [slandered].**

- “despotes” [deh **spah** tays] - “lord, master, owner.”
  - a. Christians were to have full respect for their masters. They were to obey their masters, not rebel against them.
  - b. Masters would forbid their slaves to be Christians if they rebelled against their masters once they became a Christian. Masters and other outsiders would argue, “Does your newly espoused religion prompt you to rebel and violate the law of the empire?”
  - c. God and Christianity would suffer blasphemy and persecution if slaves were rebellious.
  - d. “Our doctrine” [teaching] is a reference to the teaching [doctrine] of Christ. It is literally “he didaskalia” [hay dee dah skah **lee** ah] meaning “the teaching.”

**COL 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven**

1. Paul instructs Christians masters not to abuse or threaten their slaves. (Eph. 6:9).
  - a. They are to treat slaves with “justice and fairness.”
  - b. “master” is here “kurios” [**koo** ree ahs] meaning Lord. It is used here with the same meaning of “despotes” used by Paul in 1 Timothy 6:1.
2. They are accountable to God. They must never forget they have a Master in heaven who could be severe and cruel with them.

**1TI 6:2 And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because [on the ground]**

**they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more** [even better], **because those who partake of the benefit** [from their service] **are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles** [duties].

1. Christians slaves are not to resent their Christian masters., but to obey them. Paul again used “despotes” for “master.”
2. They would be tempted to say, “If my master were really a Christian, he would not keep me a slave.”
3. They should serve them even all the more, **“because those who partake of the benefit are believers.”**
  - a. They should be grateful they had a kind, Christian master to serve rather than a tyrant.
  - b. Their labors would benefit a Christian master who would in turn benefit Christianity.
4. “Teach and preach these principles” - They were to keep on teaching and preaching.

Lit. “teach and exhort these things.” “parakaleo” [pah rah kah leh oh] - “exhort, entreat.”

- a. They were never to grow weary of preaching the truth nor should be.
- b. This applies to slavery and every other teaching of the Lord.
- c. This would also benefit the slave.

### **Some Additional Comments About Slavery**

1. Many slaves were converted to Christ, and some of their masters were converted.
  - a. Christ promised sweet rest. (Matt. 11:28-30).
  - b. Slaves and masters wanted to be free from their sins and have a hope of heaven.
  - c. Heaven is the place of rest for those “in the Lord.” (Rev. 14:13).
2. The New Testament teaches a slave could be a Christian. (1 Cor. 7:21,22).

**1CO 7:21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.**

**1CO 7:22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.**

- a. God loved slaves, and they could be saved. (Jn. 3:16). “whosoever” - See Heb. 5:9; Acts 10:34,35.
  - b. Yes, if they could legally gain their freedom, they should certainly do so.
  - c. They should know that being a slave did not preclude one from heaven nor did it mean they were displeasing to God.
  - d. All of us are Christ’s slaves. We voluntarily submit to Christ in all things.
3. Some slaves were strongly tempted to rebel for a variety of reasons.

- a. Some might rebel because freedom in Christ meant to them that they were free from earthly masters.
- b. Some might rebel because of a misunderstanding of Galatians 3:27, 28.

**GAL 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

**GAL 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

- 1). These verses did not mean there are no distinctions in this world. The Jew does not cease to be a Jew nor does the Greek cease to be a Greek. The same is true in regard to gender and slavery.
- 2) The meaning is that in Christ there are no distinctions. All are part of the one body and are saved by Jesus Christ. The master and slave were on an equality in the church and with God.
- 3) They were free in Christ, and some thought this meant they were free from their masters, especially if they had a Christian master.

#### **4. The New Testament instructs slaves to obey their masters.**

TIT 2:9 Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, TIT 2:10 not pilfering [stealing], but showing all good faith that they may adorn [glorify] the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

COL 3:22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

- a. Loyalty to the heavenly Master did not relieve one of faithfulness to his earthly master.
- b.. They were to serve their earthly masters with wholehearted service - not just when they were looking. (Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5-8).
- c. They were not to steal from theirs masters or cheat them in any way.
- d. Christians did not have the power to overthrow slavery.
- e. Any attempt to overthrow slavery would cause men to speak evil against God and Christianity, and would bring on a mass slaughter of slaves. It would also mean that other slaves would not be allowed to come to Christ.

5. The New Testament does not condemn slavery, but regulates it.

6. It teaches principles lead to the abandonment of slavery. (Matt. 22:39; 7:12; 13:34, 35; Heb. 2:9).

7. In places where the gospel is preached and widely accepted slavery slowly disappears.

8. This change is brought about by a change in the mind set of its citizens and the legal system.

#### **Slavery Today**

1. Slavery is repulsive to freedom loving people.
2. There is still much slavery in the world today.

3. There are more people in slavery today than in the first century.
4. We should use our voting power to oppose slavery in any form.
5. We should encourage our government to use its influence to oppose slavery here and in other places.
6. Those who are slaves and those who are masters are amenable to these teachings.
7. We should vigorously proclaim the gospel that will eradicate slavery **from sin** and **from men**.
8. It is worse to be a slave to sin than to be a literal slave with a human master.
9. I assume Paul would advise slaves to obey Acts 5:29 if their masters would forbid to obey Christ or force them to denounce Christ.
  - a. Under the Roman system this would mean certain death for the slave.
  - b Those who died for “righteousness sake” had a home in heaven. (Matt. 5:10-12).
10. The book of Philemon gives some important insights about slavery.

### **Book of Philemon**

8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you [Philemon] to do that which is proper, 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you-- since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--

- Paul was in prison at Rome when he penned this letter in about 62 A.D..

#### **Runaway Onesimus Was Converted By Paul Formerly A Worthless Slave**

10 I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus,  
11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

#### **Onesimus Sent Back To Philemon**

12 And I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but of your own free will.

#### **Onesimus Would Be His Slave Forever (Until death or release)**

15 For perhaps he was for this reason parted from you for a while, that you should have him back forever,  
16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

#### **Philemon Urged To Accept Onesimus As He Would Paul**

17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). 20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my

heart in Christ.

### **Optimistic Philemon Would Do More Than He Was Urged To Do**

21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. 22 And at the same time also prepare me a lodging; for I hope that through your prayers I shall be given to you.

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