

Intro: In the book of Ephesians we have seen how greatly Paul desires to glorify God by revealing the supremacy of Jesus Christ in our salvation and in our subsequent life in Him. From chapter one's incredible statements of God's grace given to us in Christ by blessing us with every spiritual blessing, through chapters two and three where we find that God has brought Jew and Gentile together in Jesus, apart from the Law, but rather through the blood of Christ, and through chapters four and five where Paul teaches how the truth of the gospel changes the way that we live from the inside out. Being filled with the Holy Spirit produces in us a different kind of power, the power to humbly serve one another for the glory of Christ. It is this power, not accomplished through our mere will-power or mind-set, but through the presence of the Spirit within us, that changes the very foundational institutions of society: the family, husbands/wives and parents/children, and the workplace. In chapter 6:5-9, we are shown again how the glorious gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ transforms the way that we relate to each other in our workplace. For the Ephesians, this was most particular in the relationship between the slave and his master.

Let me give you a brief rundown on what slavery was like in Rome during the time of Christ, because when we think of slavery our minds immediately go to the context of American slavery based upon racism, cruelty, and hatred. Roman slavery was not like American slavery in every way, but neither was it rainbows and puppy dogs, either.

According to Roman law, every slave was considered a person. They were not legally deemed animals or chattel, although many did view them as tools rather than completely human. Slaves were not slaves simply because of their race or nationality. Most became slaves due to debt or to capture in war. According to Greek law four differences separated the freed man from the slave:

1. Freed persons were their own representative in legal matters, whereas slaves had to be represented by an owner or a legally authorized representative for the owner.
2. Freed persons were not subject to seizure as property, whereas slaves were subject to seizure and arrest by anyone.
3. Freed persons could earn their own living as they desired whereas slaves had to do what their owner ordered
4. Freed persons could live where they wished whereas slaves had to live where their master ordered.
(Harold Hoehner)

In Roman law slaves could sell themselves into slavery knowing that they could regain their freedom. Epictetus relates that when he was a slave he was given food, clothes, shelter, and medical care when he was sick. He did not receive these when he became free. There were many reasons why a person would sell themselves into slavery for a time, including provisions of life and it was easier to climb the social power system of Rome. Some persons would sell themselves into slavery in order to become the *servus actor*, the chief accountant of a large estate, whereby they could eventually buy their freedom and keep their post, ensuring wealth and power for their children.

Roman slaves also were indistinguishable from other Roman citizens outside of their clothes and the fact that they didn't keep the money they earned. In fact, it was not unusual for freedmen and slaves to work side by side. Slaves were given much freedom to go and conduct life as a freedperson, although they still must answer to their masters. In this way, most of the work done in Rome was done by slaves who were highly educated. Doctors, lawyers, teachers of rhetoric, grammar, and literacy were some of the jobs of slaves. Some even became philosophers. Slaves worked in many areas of the economy. Miners, potters, cooks, bakers, furniture makers, municipal services, jewelers, tailors, winery managers, stewards in charge of large estates and businesses. William Barclay estimates that Rome had over 60 million slaves who did most of the work of Rome while the powerful and elite wrestled for power and influence in the political and social spheres.

Roman law also required that slaves receive an allowance from their masters. This allowance could be saved up to purchase their freedom and become Roman citizens. In these ways, Roman slavery was quite different than the horrific institution of American racial slavery.

This did not mean, however, that slavery in Rome was wonderful. In fact, slaves had to right to a court of law in instances of wrongdoing by their master. Slaves would receive the death penalty for informing on their masters. When it comes down to it, Roman fathers had the right to kill their own families (Patria Potestas) and Roman masters had the right to kill their own slaves. While there were many kind masters, slaves still received little to no legal protection from their masters. One's experience of slavery relied completely upon the character of one's master.

In this context, then, we see that:

Paul does not endorse slavery

Onesimus, Philemon 16

Slaves should take their chances to be free, 1 Cor 7:21-22

Slave in Christ = Free; Free in Christ = Christ's slave

Neither does he condemn it as a system

He returned Onesimus to his master, but with a new promise

The Gospel of Christ changes a society from within, by the Holy Spirit transforming hearts, not from external compulsion

The Gospel is about hope in Christ, not hope in physical life, comfort, or rights

A person can be free in this world, with nobody in authority over him, but still be under the wrath of God. Freedom is not the answer to the world's greatest need, redemption is.

Many people feel that the transformation of society will then transform the individual, but the Gospel shows us that it's the other way around. Paul knew that the transformation of communities was only due to the influence of the Holy Spirit within the individual, who then lived out gospel humility in the community.

In the Gospel we give up our rights for the sake of Christ and others, the eternal REAL

Does this mean that we shouldn't try and legislate freedom for slaves?

Not necessarily, but it does mean that our primary purpose in the Kingdom of God is not physical freedom, but spiritual freedom through the blood of Jesus Christ, even when still physically enslaved. Christ doesn't necessarily free us from the bonds of this broken world, but He does give us His Spirit to cause us to endure them with hope and to use them to proclaim His power and redemption to others. Giving up of our power and rights is the best way to adorn the gospel of Christ.

"In Jesus...we see that God's glory exists in the very reverse [of the world's glory] – not so much in His ability to exalt Himself and humble man, but in His willingness to humble Himself for the sake of man – not so much in a mighty display of power that would break in pieces those that oppose Him, but rather in the hiding of that power and the showing of grace to the undeserving when they turn to Him in repentance." ~Roy Hession

The Gospel of grace shows us that we are to give up our rights for the sake of Jesus, the One who gave up His own rights of Mastery in order to die for us. His love is that great. So, because of this great love which He has shown us, we can give up our rights to serve each other in humble gratitude for the sake of the glory of Christ. Now, while you aren't slaves in the strictest sense of the word, all of us have someone with authority over us, from our bosses, police authority, legal authority, etc. In these relationships, we are the "slaves" and should follow the commands of the Apostle, in the name of Christ, so as to bring people to see the treasure that is Christ.

Just as it takes the “filling of the Spirit” for wives to submit to their husbands and for husbands to love their wives, for children to obey their parents and for fathers not to exasperate their children, so it takes the filling of the Spirit for slaves to obey their masters with goodwill and sincerity of heart, and for masters to treat their slaves with goodwill and sincerity of heart without threats. It is all tied up to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to humbly love one another as He brings to mind and heart the glorious promises of Jesus in the gospel: You are completely righteous before God because Christ died for you, so you don’t have to claim your rights. See Jesus and lay your glory down so that He will be praised and honored.

1. Those under the authority of others are to obey their superiors for the sake of Jesus
 - a. Obey (imperative), to listen to a command and follow orders
 - i. your masters according to the flesh (earthly masters)
 - ii. Earthly authority extends only to earthly domain (Matt 10:28; 1 Thess 5:23-24)
 1. We have a greater Master behind the earthly masters
 2. ILLUSTRATION: An acting dog has a “stage master” and an “actual master”
 - iii. Obedience and faithfulness adorn the gospel of Christ (Titus 2:9-10)
 1. Our obedience is not about “our rights” or our own sense of justice, but about the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ
 2. The One who gave up His rights to become a servant and save us (Phil 2:6ff)
 - b. with fear: reverence, humble disquiet because of a power that has authority over you
 - i. Used in 5:21 in regards to submission to each other
 - ii. By the power of the Holy Spirit (5:18)
 - c. with trembling: quaking, with the anxiety of the one who does not trust himself, but tries his hardest
 - i. often coupled with “fear” in the LXX (20x) and the NT (4x)
 - ii. fear that is outwardly expressed
 - d. “Fear and Trembling” is a sign of deep humility, rooted in the gospel of grace
 - i. 1 Cor 2:3-5; 2 Cor 7:15; Phil 2:12-13
 - ii. Every believer should live in “fear and trembling” because we see with great circumspect the reality of eternity and the great and holy tasks which Christ has called us to when He calls us to a cross
 1. Seeing the REAL, the eternal Truth of the gospel to God’s glory, humbles us and emboldens us
 2. It is not the tyranny and authority of the earthly master that leads to this “fear and trembling” but rather the weightier calling to glorify Christ in this holy task of serving in His name.
 - iii. It is CHRIST whom we serve!
2. We are to obey in sincerity and genuineness of heart for the sake of Jesus
 - a. in the simplicity (singleness) of your hearts
 - i. sincerity – straightness – completely and wholeheartedly, without duplicity or wavering between masters (oneself or otherwise)
 - ii. The gospel changes society from *within*, rather than imposing change from without
 1. The entire concept of slavery in the church was to be transformed by transformed hearts
 - iii. manner of obedience to a master, without duplication to other masters
 1. do what you say you’ll do
 2. work hard to complete the task

3. don't pretend, but give undivided attention and focus to the command
 - a. "Words, words, words! I'm so sick of words....Sing me no song, read me no rhyme, don't waste my time, show me!" -My Fair Lady
4. We cannot simply work with integrity and singleness without sharing the gospel, however.
 - a. "Thinking that our work will glorify God when people do not know we are Christians is like admiring an effective ad on TV that never mentions the product. People may be impressed, but they won't know what to buy." - John Piper

3. Your obedience is to Christ

a. **as to the Christ** (HOW and WHY)

- i. obey your earthly masters as you would obey Christ
 1. line of authority ends with Jesus, He is the ultimate master
 2. exceptions: when asked to sin or work against Christ (just like exceptions with wife/husband)
- ii. though equal with believing master, servants should retain their submission and not stand on an egalitarian role or right
 1. Don't be argumentative: slaves don't need to know why (Titus 2:9)
 2. Treat them with honor, even when they're dishonorable, for the sake of the gospel (1 Tim 6:1)

b. NOT: according to eye-service, **as** man-pleasers

c. BUT: **as servants of Christ**

- i. doing the will of God out of the soul
- ii. serving with affection (good-will)
 1. How you work speaks loads to the world about Jesus!
 - a. In the words of Piper, "Sloth can be a greater stumbling block than crime."
 - b. Seek the welfare of the city and the welfare of your boss, your judge, your police officers, your landlord, etc.
 2. **as to the Lord**, not to men
 - a. **KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS** and His humble bearing up of the cross for us sinners.
 - i. Your sins were so egregious that Jesus had to die to save you from God's wrath toward you.
 - ii. God loves you so deeply that Jesus was glad to die for you!
 1. Every blessing, every good thing, that you think your "freedom" and your "rights" will bring you are empty promises. All that you need has already been given to you in Christ. You can trust Him.
 - b. **KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS**
 - i. The Holy Spirit is revealing Christ *to our hearts* at all times. Jesus shows us the ultimate servitude by coming down from heaven to die as a servant (Phil 2:6-8)
 - ii. Though the world treated him unjustly, He submitted to it for the sake of the glory of God and the salvation of your soul. He loves you that much!!

- iii. Let us trust Him, fully resurrected, that He will keep His promise and that He is enough for all that we need.
- c. Coming to Christ involves ALL of our hearts; a repentance which is only partial is no repentance at all. Submission is the pulse of the heartbeat of repentance and union with Christ.

4. The LORD is the Judge of Right

- a. Having known that whatever good one might do,
- b. This (?) he will take it up **from the Lord**
 - i. “this” relates to the “good” which one does
 - ii. The future certainty of good rest in the God who makes the promise.
 - iii. whether slave or free
 - 1. The Lord is fair and just, regardless of one’s social status on earth
 - 2. 1 Cor 7:22 – the slave is the Lord’s freeman; the free is the Lord’s slave

How is living as a slave related to “taking off the old self and putting on the new” and “walking in holiness, love, unity” and “being filled with the Spirit?” It is about seeing what is real: Jesus and the gospel of grace. Relate the capacity and ability to submit, even when unjustly ruled over, to the great promises of the gospel and the Holy Spirit’s presence within us to walk like Jesus walked: humbly, self-sacrificially, submissively, pouring ourselves out. We don’t demand our rights like the world, but we voluntarily lay down our rights for the sake of the gospel and the glory of Christ.

The slaves call to obey is rooted in the Gospel-centered call to “put off the old self and put on the new.” This is Gospel living! This is being filled up with the Spirit, seeing what is ultimately Real and True. The capacity and ability to obey others and submit your power to theirs, even when you are unjustly treated, is directly related to how well we are functionally believing the Gospel. “I don’t need to prove myself because Jesus is my righteousness.” “I don’t need to have power because Jesus is my power and He is with me to sustain me to the end.” Jesus came and died for me while I was still a sinner, forgiving me completely through pouring out his own life for mine.

When we take up our crosses, we see Him standing at the open grave. We may still be in the dark tomb of our circumstance for a little while, not knowing how things will work out for our good, but Sunday’s on the way. See the great love of Jesus as your focus. He loves you so greatly that He gave up His Masterhood in Heaven to become a man, to die in your place to save you. And remember the open tomb. He is not dead anymore. He lives and He is incredibly powerful! What looked like the worst darkness the world had ever seen turned out to be the greatest and most glorious good the world will ever know! Take hope as you lay down your own power for the sake of your own Master.

Remember the promise of His Holy Spirit within you. You are not alone. You are not orphans. You belong to Christ and He is with you, even in you to produce your desire and performance of goodness.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.