

## Earthly Subordinates And Masters

1 Timothy 6: 1-2

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*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. <sup>2</sup> 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. Teach and urge these things.*

Francis Grimke served as a pastor at Fifteen Street Presbyterian in Washington, DC beginning in 1878 for over forty years. Mr Grimke was born as the son of a white plantation owner and his mother was a slave. Grimke himself was a slave. After he was freed, he became a very prominent voice in the church. There is a seminary established in his name.

I have read his book a few times over but I was reading again yesterday. And in the first few pages of this book “Meditations on Preaching”, Mr Grimke wrote these words and I found them very refreshing. Here is what he said, *“The most serious problem with which any human being has to deal with is the problem of right living, the problem of getting out from under the power of sin and getting into right relations with God. The man who finds Jesus Christ, who finds him truly, has found the solution to all his problems, both here and here after – in time and in eternity. It is literally true – and experience as far as it goes, shows it to be true: ‘Jesus is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption’ (1 Corinthians 1: 30)”*. What a great reminder! The NLT says it this way *“God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.”*

It is God who makes you **right** and calls you into a **right** relationship with him through his Son Jesus Christ. And from that right relationship flows out *right living, conduct and behavior*.

And this has been our theme for our series in first Timothy - right living and conduct. The purpose of Paul’s letter is found in 1 Timothy chapter one verse 15 – *“I am writing these things to you so that, <sup>15</sup> if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God”* 1 Timothy 3:15.

And that is what Paul instructs Timothy to do. At the end of verse two, Paul tells Timothy to *“teach and urge these things”*. What things? Those things he has written in verses one and two. Some translations have this sentence in verse 3 but the manuscripts have it at the end of verse two.

Now, before we look at verses 1 and 2, allow me to respond to some who may say that Paul is advocating slavery. There are some, particularly from a non-Biblical worldview who have said the Bible does not condemn slavery explicitly but it also approves it. To that, my response is a big NO. Now, there is some valid criticism regarding slavery and the Bible because there have been people in history, much later after Paul, who have used the Bible to oppress and enslave others. Those people who did terrible things under the name of Christianity are a stain and a blight. They stand for nothing of Christ and his righteousness. But we also know those who have truly repented of this sin. John Newton is one such man. A slave trader turned humble Christian who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace”. Slavery, racism or prejudice of any kind is wrong and sinful. God hates it.

### **Let’s look at verse one.**

*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.* The word bondservant here is a modest word for slave. And yoke usually meant a piece of wood that was put on two oxen in the field.

*How could Paul ask servants or slaves to regard their masters as worthy of all honor?*

First of all, Paul tells Timothy early on in this letter in chapter one verses eight through ten that slavery is *contrary* to the sound doctrine. Slavery is unlawful. “*Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup> 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, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, **enslavers**, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine*” 1 Timothy 3:8-10

So, obviously Paul cannot be promoting something he had condemned earlier.

Before we unpack this verse, we must know its **history** and **context**. ***Do you know the name ‘Paul’ is actually a Roman name?*** Paul is the short name in English and for the Roman name ‘Paulus’.

Everywhere in the New Testament where the name Paul is used, it is the name ‘Paulus’ in Greek. *So how did Paul who was a Jew take on a Roman name?* His Hebrew name is ‘Saul’ pronounced ‘Sha-ool’. Well, Paul was born to parents who very likely slaves under a Roman master or patron. And when his parents were granted freedom they could take on a Roman name. That is why the name Paul. In Acts 22:28, Paul says he was born a Roman citizen. In those says, you were a Roman citizen through birth or through a citizenship process. And Paul’s parents received freedom from slavery through a process called *manumission*. Again, we won’t go into the history of how Jews became slaves under the Romans but Paul himself is very likely a son of slaves. This kind of slavery is different from what we hear in the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Here Paul is writing to first century Ephesus. Ephesus was under Roman rule during his time. And Ephesus was an urban center. And slavery affected almost all parts of the Ephesians church. Some people in the church were either slave owners or slaves or ex-slaves. Many of them were poor. Also, slavery in the first century, while it is wrong, was largely there because of *economic* and *political* reasons. For example, one could sell himself into becoming a bond-servant so that he could gain Roman citizenship and become part of the mainstream society.

And the slave-masters were far more humane than the slave masters we hear about in the American or the Western context. Lastly, by the end first of the first century this kind of slavery was pretty much on the decline.

So given this context, imagine the tension in the church of Ephesus. There were masters, slaves and ex-slaves all in the same congregation. Someone wrote that the elders were probably slave-masters too. So in light of the all the economic and political complexities and the mixed demographics in the church, what does Paul want this church to *not* do? He does not want *conflict* and *confusion* with bond servant and master worshipping in the same church. He wants them to live in *peace* and *harmony*. In the second chapter he wrote “*we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way*”. 1 Timothy 2:2.

Paul does not want God’s name to be *blasphemed*. Paul is concerned about the purity of the Gospel.

### ***So what does mean Paul by his instruction in verse one?***

First of all, the Gospel has made both the servant and the master equal in Christ “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*”. Galatians 3:28

Paul gives this instruction in a way that a modern-day employee would have to conduct himself or herself in relationship with their employer.

The bond servant was an employee of a Christian master. Both the employee and employer are now brothers in the Lord. But as brothers or sisters in the Lord, the employee brother might think “I don’t need to honor or follow my employer’s instructions”. That would not be right. The employee is still being paid.

### **Let me give an illustration:**

A few years ago, a co-worker invited me to prayer during lunch breaks. Our lunch breaks were usually an hour long. We would go out to eat at local restaurants. And once we were done eating, we would stand outside the restaurant or in the area and pray for the local businesses. It was a weekly thing and this was a good time of encouragement for each other. Now, imagine if we got caught up in the whole prayer walk activity and spent two or three hours. And when my supervisor asks me why was I delayed in my return to office and I answered “well, I was praying”, that would not go well. Not only was I

spending all this time on my employer's watch but I can't expect to be paid for it. And if the employer was not a Christian that be even more damaging to the cause of Christ.

So it is in this context, Paul says to not do anything that would cause damage to your reputation as a believer in the workplace. Whether your supervisor is Christian or not, you have an obligation to follow the expectations or rules of your employer. Because this is how you display Christ.

I would imagine there are many domineering, manipulative and selfish bosses in this world who care little for the welfare for their employees. So even there let you conduct and behavior be in such a way that you adorn the Gospel. But you have a Christian boss, you are his brother. And honor the boss because your supervisor is your partner in the Gospel.

**Verse two:**

*<sup>2</sup> 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. Teach and urge these things.*

This instruction is for employers.

Paul uses language that is very endearing. Same way that God says about you are his beloved. Those who are not a people I will call my beloved (Romans 9).

In Paul's letter to Philemon, listen to what Paul tells Philemon. Philemon is a Christian but he is also a slave-master not in the modern sense but in the Roman time period sense. And Onesimus is Philemon's bondservant, slave or employee.

*"I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. <sup>11</sup> (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) <sup>12</sup> I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. <sup>13</sup> I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, <sup>14</sup> but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. <sup>15</sup> For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, <sup>16</sup> no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord"* Philemon 1:10-16

This is Christian love and brotherhood. You know this wonderful instruction to us and so applicable to us as believers. In the secular world, you see a sort of a "dog-eat-dog" world or you hear about "hostile takeovers". But in God's economy, Paul sees sincerity, honor, respect, love and brotherhood.

We saw already from Galatians 3 that there are no distinctions in your identity as a Christian in Jesus Christ. However, there are roles each one plays. Whether you are an employer or an employee, both must honor each other. Both must recognize that they have to give an account to their real Master.

*“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.”* Ephesians 6:9

I began my message with Francis Grimke’s booklet. Dr Grimke faced opposition in his own church when he voiced reforms against prejudice yet Dr Grimke followed his true Master to the end. That Master is our Lord Jesus Christ. This Master is the Lord and Sustainer of the universe. And yet our Master Jesus Christ became a slave so that you and I could be set free from slavery to sin.

*“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery”.* Galatians 5:1

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Earthly Subordinates And Masters.** Timothy 1:1-2

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. In spite of our social, cultural, economic and ethnic differences, what does the Gospel reveal to us about our identity in Jesus Christ? Verse 2, Philemon 1:16, Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 12:13

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Why does Paul instruct to honor those over you and instruct earthly masters to respect those who are under them? Verse 1 and 2. 1 Peter 2:18-20, Romans 2:21-24
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: Do you see any need to change course in your workplace, place of employment or community for you to be a witness for Gospel? How? What steps will you take to see that God's name is not dis-honored?