

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;

6 not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

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

9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

This passage completes the “household “ passage in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

We must keep in mind that Paul is addressing a congregation of believers and that the context is how they are to live in the context of their households.

We can safely say that in the assembly there were husbands and wives and children and slaves and masters.

There could have been husbands whose wives were not present, wives whose husbands were not present, children, as we qualified last week, not necessarily little children, who were there without parents present. There could have been masters present without slaves and slaves present without masters and these slaves may have been husbands or wives or children and the masters may have been the same.

The point of all of this is to say that all of these types of persons, in Christ, made up the household of faith in the local assembly and may have made up any number of different actual types of households.

It is in this context that Paul now specifically addresses the slaves and it is striking to note that he speaks to them before he speaks to the masters.

Why is this so unusual? Why should this get out attention in a forceful manner? It would have been an unusual way of writing in Greco-roman culture and even in Judaistic culture, where slavery was still practiced, though differently.

What is so striking about the direction of Paul's teaching to the slaves first is that it qualifies them as individuals who are just as important Christ as their masters.

Although in societal terms or economic status they were not equals, Paul is stating that they are spiritually equal in the eyes of God. Slaves are just as equal, yet different as are husbands and wives. For him to give them instruction before he mentions the masters was not politically or sociologically correct

It is also interesting to note that Paul again addresses the submissive person in the relationship first, as he did wives, with the admonition that they are to be submissive to their masters as if they were submitting to, Christ.

Consider the instruction for a moment for the wife of a slave. She is to submit to her husband as unto the Lord and she is to submit to her master as unto the Lord. How well would our wives today hold to that principle if they were also slaves.

And yet, a slave could easily understand the concept of being a slave to Christ, whether it was in a forced or a bondservant role.

Slaves are admonished to be obedient in the flesh.

They may disagree in conscience or belief but they are to physically obey and do as they are instructed.

In their temporary circumstances they are to obey their masters.

In the temporal legal commands they are to be obedient.

There is already Scriptural evidence that men are not to obey men when it is a contradiction in obedience to God. Peter and John, Paul and others disregarded commands not to preach the Gospel and suffered accordingly.

Paul would not be telling his spiritual equals to do any less than he has when a matter of religious obedience was before them.

But, there is also a very practical reason for Paul's instructions that would set Christian slaves apart from pagans.

Often, slaves were considered to be lazy, slovenly, ignorant and inarticulate but Christian slaves would have an attitude and a demeanor and possibly even a way of communicating verbally, if asked, why they were different from other slaves, if owned by a pagan.

Can you imagine a pagan slave owner seeing a genuine brotherly relationship between a Christian slave and a Christian master?

He sees the obedience of a slave and the authority of a master but he also sees a kindred spirit between the two somehow sensing that although they are slave and master there is a relationship that goes beyond that. The societal roles are evident but there is more than that. It is evidenced in the relationship.

Furthermore, the slave master relationship might have been between people from different ethnic or cultural groups.

Paul then instructs the slaves that they should have an attitude, that they obey *with fear and trembling*. They are to reverence those who are over them, fearing to displease them, and trembling lest they should justly incur their anger and indignation regardless if the master is Christ's or a pagan.

This obedience is also to be done with absolute sincerity, with singleness of heart.

There should be no pretending of obedience. It must be legitimate, honest and true, with readiness and cheerfulness, without hypocrisy and and with all integrity and faithfulness.

Here it may be a good place to remember that these slaves could have related to what was written in the earlier part of the letter.

Not only should they obey, but they had a liberty that was purchased for them that had eternal, not temporal consequences.

They have the same blessing in Christ as any other believer.

**Eph. 1:3 ¶ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,**

**4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.**

**They were specifically chosen to be the recipients of these blessings. This was not an arbitrary whim of a master buying slaves to see who had the best physical qualities or skills or abilities. God chose them before the foundation of the world, not at a slave auction in Ephesus..**

**In love5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,**

They were adopted as sons, just like Paul, possibly just like their masters or other masters, in love and in kindness which some may never had known before.

They were not just randomly chosen or purchased because of anything they had to offer to a master. No, they were predestined by God in love, to be His child just like men of great stature in the world who were brought to humility and repentance and faith by the same grace of God that saved their souls.

**6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**

His grace was granted to them freely, though they were not free temporally, they were free indeed in soul, free in Christ. The Beloved one by whom they were loved. They were a part of the purpose that brings God glory. How wonderful, how marvelous and how amazing.

**7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace  
**8** which He lavished on us.

More than specific little gold and silver coins were spent to purchase their freedom. A slave could be set free with the proper redemption price and the proper coinage. But they were set free through the blood of Christ. Slaves understood the price and cost of redemption. Redemption was something, unless you were a willing bond servant, that every slave knew about and longed for. They understood what it took for someone to be willing to pay the price of redemption for their freedom.

I believe this aspect of salvation was understood best by a slave who was in bondage, not only to sin, but to another man, possibly for his whole life. Born a slave to die a slave. Longing for redemption. Yet no one was willing, or would pay the price to set him or her free.

And not only were these riches spent by God but they were lavished, they were overflowing and abundant riches .

So, as they understood hat it meant to be a slave to a man, they now knew what it meant to be a slave to crist and were instructed, to be slaves

**“not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”**

It was easy for many slaves to please their master for ulterior motives. A false obedience might in some way lead to some better circumstances within the household.

Some favor could be imparted if a master thought one was being exceptionally obedient and productive. For most slaves this was a way to improve their circumstances.

But, the Christian ethic as a slave to Christ above any earthly master, calls for complete honesty and genuine character.

Obedience to earthly masters is obedience to Christ.

This service is to be rendered with good will.

It is to be given not grudgingly but freely and cheerfully for God has purposed in His will for them to do so. He is working to do of His good will and of His good pleasure in their lives.

None of these things sanctions cruel treatment or excessive demands by masters who are Christians or otherwise.

None of these things are meant to say that slavery is not demeaning and a terrible thing to inflict upon others, especially the way it was sanctioned as being biblical in this country in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

But the preaching of the Gospel was meant to free men from their sin and from the wrath of God. Its primary purpose was to change men's hearts, not society. Whatever changes come in society is as a result of men obeying Christ is good and is part of God's sovereign purposes.

The greatest abolitionists in history were Christians.

God in his wisdom used slaves to demonstrate His sustaining grace in difficult circumstances. History proves that slaves shared Christ with their masters.

Rendering service with good will as unto God, not men was a behavior that could not easily be reasoned away by those who were masters or by slaves who were pagans and saw how different the Christian slaves were in serving their masters.

*Service, performed with conscience, and from a regard to God, though it be to unrighteous masters, will be accounted by Christ as service done to himself. Matthew Henry*

**NAS95** knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

There is a reward for service unto Christ. The reward here is not for serving men but for serving Christ.

No matter what reward a master gives or does not give his slave, Christ will give the proper reward to all whether slave or master.

Christ is impartial in salvation, and in final judgment. All kinds of men, will be judged by Christ, and all kinds of men will be rewarded by Christ.

And it is here tha Paul now addresses the masters, after instructing their spiritual equals, the slaves.

**NAS95** And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

What an incredible statement. Masters, do the same things to them. In one sense, serve them as you are serving Christ. Your role is as a master but you are to treat them as your brothers and the greatest in the kingdom of heaven are those who serve others.

The real depth of this statement however is about the proper treatment and the single heartedness toward them under God.

*“Be just to them, as you expect they should be to you: show the like good-will and concern for them, and be careful in so doing to approve yourselves to God.” Matthew Henry*

*“but to singleness of heart, benevolence, humanity, and a regard to Christ, and the will of God, and to the doing of good things, and to the performance of their duty, as they would have their servants do theirs; whose duty, if religious masters, is, with respect to their souls, to instruct them in, and use them to religious exercises, to pray with them, and for them, to set them good examples, to prevent them falling into, bad company, and to allow them proper time for religious duties; and with respect to their bodies, and outward concerns, to provide sufficient food and proper raiment for them, or to give them their due wages, to take care of them when sick or lame, and show compassion and humanity to them, to encourage those that are prudent, faithful, and laborious, and to correct the disobedient, and expel the incorrigible: “John Gill*

The masters are also to give up threatening.

This does not they could not properly discipline their slaves. But, many masters would threaten to separate husband and wives and their children if they were disobedient. They would also treated with all kinds of excessive punishment.

Paul says that this is not acceptable as a Christian master.

They are to exercise their authority in a godly way, displaying Christian principles and character and the filling of the Holy Spirit and knowing what the will of God is, as he exhorted all of the church earlier in the letter.



They are reminded that their Master is in heaven and there is no partiality with Him. Slaves are not treated more harshly or less harshly than anyone else. The masters are subject to judgment by God and will be held accountable and responsible for how they treat their slaves. Again this does not diminish the equal yet different concept that is present throughout this portion of the letter. Slaves and masters like husbands and wives are equal in their spiritual position in Christ yet different in the roles that God has ordained for them in this temporal life.

*“Neither is there respect of persons with him; a rich, a wealthy, and a dignified master, if he be unjust, imperious, and abusive, is not a jot the nearer being accepted of God for his riches, wealth, and honour. He will call masters and servants to an impartial account for their conduct one to another, and will neither spare the former because they are more advanced nor be severe towards the latter because they are inferior and mean in the world. If both masters and servants would consider their relation and obligation to God and the account they must shortly give to him, they would be more careful of their duty to each other.”* Matthew Henry

What we have studied in the context of household relations in the early church should have taught us that the body life of the church was meant to impact the culture around.

It was not so singular that it stood apart, isolated and separate from the rest of the culture. However, it was supposed to be recognized within the culture as something that was different and unique. It was to be seen that Christians who did the same things in household relationships concerning marriage, having children and having slaves and masters lived

differently than the pagans. Their relationships had a depth and an interaction that was not known by the pagans in the broadest sense. Life, was meant to be lived unto the glory of God, and as the church throughout the ages lives in that way, God will be glorified.

(addendum: this passage should not be applied to employer employee relationships. The text cannot support this application)