

We continue in our discussion of 1 Timothy. We are in 1 Timothy 6. The title is “What Love Does”. Love is an action word so you want to know what does love do. We had a beautiful example this morning already. Here we have a couple of families that felt that in order to in some way live out the love of God given to them in Jesus Christ they decided to expand their families by taking in a child that was not born to them but was born for them, that they might raise that child. What a marvelous thing to do! Well, there are other applications that I want us to think about. For instance, I doubt that any of us would spontaneously put “love” and “labor relations” together. We generally see this as a competitive if actually antagonistic relationship, whether view from the employers perspective in offering a job with compensation or viewed from the employee’s side in seeking a fair compensation for what is needed to live, all agree that settling up matters of income and benefits is serious business. Certainly it is not someplace where sentiment or religion is supposed to interfere. That, I think, is a fair representation of the modern American attitude regarding labor relations, yet it doesn’t match up very well with what the Bible has to say. It is the Bible that we want to look at. If you haven’t yet, I encourage you to turn to 1 Timothy 6. We will concentrate on verses 1-2, but I am going to read all the way down to verse 10 so that we have a larger sense of the context that the apostle Paul in writing to his protégé Timothy wanted him to understand.

*(6:1) “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. (6:2) 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.”*

*(6:3) Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, (6:4) he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, (6:5) and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (6:6) But godliness with contentment is great gain, (6:7) for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. (6:8) But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (6:9) But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (6:10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

If you step back and look at the flow of this letter that Paul wrote to Timothy, there is no obvious reason for a chapter break between the closing verses of chapter five and the opening verses of chapter six. The reason that is significant is that an argument can be made that Paul cites the relationship between masters and bond-servants as a kind of application of his assertion regarding the deeds which dominated the relationships between them, whether secret or open, whether good deeds or sins. Notice how he closes chapter five. *“The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.”* In the world of Paul’s day there was little to no public accountability for what went on in the running of households or private businesses. Masters had virtually unlimited power whether over their family members or over household servants, or over the

slaves that worked their fields or in their shops. In the face of adversity, cruelty or oppression by the master hope was hard to come by. If there was hope to be found in that system it was almost invariably a matter of patronage. What do I mean by “patronage”? A person of power and wealth extending his favor and protection on your behalf. That was how you gained some sense of security in a dangerous world. In such a world only the rich and powerful could afford to be honorable, could afford to be altruistic and generous. For the rest life was resignation to what the fates had decreed or an endless striving to catch the eye and capture the favor of someone higher up the social and economic scale. I appreciated Laura’s – that pretty girl with the red hair – that one of the things she appreciated about going to Mexico was how much she had here. I would say that that includes our whole history and pattern of labor relations. We simply don’t realize how vulnerable employees often are in the world that doesn’t have structures [and] laws that protect the employer and the employee both.

Hope could be found if you found somebody to protect you. When Paul wrote at verses 24-25 that the sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later, so also good works are conspicuous and even those that are not cannot remain hidden, he wrote for people for whom hidden virtues were as pointless as open sins were disastrous. The preaching of the gospel would among other things change the world view of ancient civilization.

I want us to focus on what Paul says to Timothy in verses 1 and 2. At the heart of Paul’s counsel in these verses is trust in God, both His justice and His protection. Notice what he says: *“Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor...”* Why, so they will get a good job? So they will have a raise; so they will get the best place to live? No! You want to treat their own masters *“...as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.”* Oh, I see; it is the honor of God and His revealed truth that are primary rather than the immediate well-being or satisfaction of either the master or the bondservant. The believer’s relationship with God is primary and determines how all other relationships are to be valued and conducted. Paul concludes his instructions to the bondservant with an almost impossible requirement. This is how he concludes. He concludes by saying 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 believed and beloved. First, all masters are to be respected. Peter makes this point in the strongest possible terms. If you turn to 1 Peter 2:18-19 this is what Peter says: *“Servants be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.”* Peter goes on to stress that the Christian servant or bondservant of slave is ultimately guided by the example of Jesus Christ. This is what he says: *“Servants be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.”* Then in chapter 3:21 he says, *“For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.”* Whoa! Take that to the Labor Relations Board!

That is radical, is it not? That is not how we think; we do not think this way. But Paul takes the issue further than that. Paul not only says that the master is to be treated with respect, but he goes on to say that the servant is to seek their benefit. And he goes on and he says that they are to be loved. They are to be loved because they are fellow believers. You have imaginations as well as I; some of you may

have experience where you can put yourself into a situation where you are being unjustly or unfairly treated by an employer – we don't have masters in that sense but the power relationships are the same – you are being unjustly treated. Maybe you find that you are not getting your full pay, your benefits are not coming through: all the things that [can come up], and what Paul is saying to Timothy is that workers in that situation have their primary concern to be certain that the honor of God and the goodness of God's teaching will not be in any way tarnished. In order to achieve that end, in spite of being unjustly worked, you will work hard to benefit your employer; you will do everything you can to benefit your employer. In addition to that you will take counsel with the Holy Spirit to love the employer.

When it comes to the matter of loving as Christians, we need to always remember that it is not our free choice as to how that love is carried out, because what we are told specifically is that we are to love others the way Jesus loved us. What that does, is we [say], OK, OK, OK, I have to love this unjust master or employer who is jerking me around, I have to work hard, benefiting the company, maximize his profits or at least maximize my productivity on his behalf or her behalf, and in addition to that, I need to love this person. What does it mean to love this person? Well, right here is the manual; I go to the Word [of God] and I read primarily the Gospels. I go through the Gospels and see if I can understand the model of how Jesus loved people. The big one, of course, is that He died for our sins and we all understand that, but it is good to go back and see the way in which Jesus handled a variety of situations in order to manifest the love of God.

If you have problems with this, and I know that we have problems with this because I have problems with this, when I read this I say to myself, "You have got to be kidding!" With our passion for equality along with our predisposition to favor the underdog – isn't that the American life? We are all brothers together and we are all on behalf of the guy who is down. That is what we like to do. We feel good about that. We have problems [therefore] with [what Paul is saying.] In our books, doesn't it seem strange when you read this and you read anyplace else [in the New Testament], why doesn't Paul spend a bunch of time talking to the masters? I mean, of the two who are the most likely to be unjust? We have opinions about this that are woven into western culture. Here is one of the ways in which it goes. Our culture holds that power corrupts, and the classic line is that absolute power corrupt absolutely. So if you have a master-servant relationship, who has the power and who doesn't? So consequently, who is corrupt? Ah! This is a cultural bent, a paradigm in our thinking. This doesn't mean it is true; it just means it is the spontaneous way that we think. So we tend then to be suspicious of people with power. We assume that people who have power are going to be corrupt; that they are going to take advantage of that power to feather their own nest, and if they are feathering their nest they are probably stealing feathers from yours. That is kind of the American set of mind. Paul is speaking against that set of mind at least in terms of practical actions that would flow out of it.

It is curious, however, I would point out, that there is an inconsistency in the American public at this point which leaves me utterly baffled. We believe that power corrupts and we believe that people with power are corrupted, yet at the same time culturally as a nation we continue to surrender ever greater power to our government. This is irrational. The irrationality of this behavior is hidden behind what I call the veil of law. After all, government is supposedly constrained by law. Government officials are otherwise known as bureaucrats, and bureaucrats are simply servants of the public both empower by

and constrained by law. Right? This is a myth. It is a modern myth that the government is not our master but our servant. The reality is that our government is our master. We have become servants. Jesus was not blinded by myths. He knew that the masters of the world were over-lords who lorded it over their subjects. When they wish they can be both helpful and generous, at which times they are called “benefactors”. In Luke 22:25 Jesus says, *“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them and those in authority over them are called benefactors.”* A benefactor is one who blesses those in need out of the abundance of their own wealth and power. However it is important for us to be aware of the fact that [what] the benefactor gives does not lessen his power or increase the power of those who are helped. By the way, are we all aware of what socio-economic in America benefits mostly from the government’s programs? It is us, the people in this room. It is the middle class. We are actually receiving a greater amount of economic advantage and benefits from government programs than the poor through all of the tax advantages, educational support and all the rest. But we are not empowered by this. We are enslaved. We are enslaved because our economic dependency increasingly makes us incapable of voting against those who continue to supply what we need. It is necessary, beloved, to examine statistics carefully and understand what in fact is the case. In the case of those who have power and wealth without accountability to those whom they serve, their gifts come from on high to those below.

Masters relative to servants, bondservants and slaves have both power and wealth. As we seek to understand Paul’s instructions here, remember that Paul will return with instructions for the rich as well as for those who want to be rich. I read more of the chapter down through verse 10 and if you read the end of chapter six you will see further instructions. Right now Paul is only addressing the question of how servants are to address their masters.

It is essential, it is obvious, that masters and slaves are not equals. In the New Testament there is no particular value or drive to establish equality amongst all people in the political or legal sense. You can see that. No attempt to correct slavery. No attempt is made to address the arbitrary power of the upper classes over the lower. On the other hand there was a lively and powerful drive for equality of respect or honor and compassion, especially for fellow believers. This comes forward spontaneously in the fellowship of the first church in Jerusalem. We are told that they had all things in common. More exactly what Luke wrote in Acts 2:44-45, *“...and all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”* There is a long distance logically between two statements. There is a long distance between “having all things in common” and “selling their belongings”. Both of those statements cannot be true at the same time in the same way. This distinction lies at the heart of what we read in Acts 5 if you are familiar with Acts 5 and the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They sold, we are told, some of their property for a certain value and then took a portion of that value and gave it to the apostles to be used for the needs of others. Was that a good thing? It was a very good thing. The difficulty, however, is that they represented the partial value as if was the whole value and the reason they did that is that they wanted everybody to be impressed that they had given the whole value of their property. Then everybody would say, “Oou!” Have you ever done anything for the “oou, that was great”? They wanted everybody to think of them as being sacrificially generous although they weren’t.

So Peter confronts them. The best part of the story is that he says, "You have resolved not to lie to men but to God." Whereupon Ananias falls down dead and later on Sapphira falls down dead and we all say "Yes! Justice." But what is important for our discussion today is what we read in Acts 5:4, because there Peter asks this question, "*While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold was it not at your disposal?*" Consequently we realize that Luke did not mean that the congregation did not own all things in common, but that everyone saw that what they owned was going to be available to meet the needs of the rest. I think we have already had discussions in this congregation, not formal ones but casual ones, where in the event of major catastrophe would we be willing to turn to one another for help. I believe we would. I believe if there was a collapse of the financial markets or a collapse of the international markets, if there was a major earthquake and we suddenly realized, "You know what, we either take care of ourselves or nobody else is going to for there is no way any aid is going to reach to us, I can guarantee you our doors would be open and so would our pantries and we would make every endeavor to ensure that everyone that we were in touch with was taken care of. True? How many are familiar with the emergency food supply [concern]: buy food so you have something on hand? Well if you come to my house we have a freezer and we have enough food for the entire congregation for a month, and that is because we just have it on hand! Our door is open.

What is essential is to understand when you read Acts at this point is to realize that the contributions that were being given were give freely, not under constraint of law. Rather [it was] under the constraint of love. This, by the way, is following Jesus Christ. Rightly understanding what was going on in the first church of Jerusalem enables us to rightly understand what Paul wrote to the Corinthians. I ask you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 8:8-14.

*"I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness."*

A few comments: Paul is speaking here about how we should view or understand appreciate our possessions. Firstly he is not saying that what is ours is not really ours. On the contrary, the fact of possession is of critical importance. It is not possible to sacrificially give away what is not mine to give. You can't do that. You cannot sacrificially give away something that is not yours. What is that called? It is called stealing. If you give away something that isn't yours to give you are taking it from somebody, and unless they have already agreed you are just stealing it. Amongst the many things which amazed and perplexed my wife and I about our children, especially in their adolescence was the remarkably casual attitude they had about possessions, most particularly about clothes. They would freely share and exchange and just as freely forget and loose them! Our children today are still generous and ready with compassion to spend their own resources to help others in need, all of them to the amazement of my wife and me. But now they are careful, for now they carry debts and pay monthly bills. When they were young generosity amongst them and their friends was the freedom of abundance and

indifference. There was no sacrifice entailed or suffering beyond occasional annoyance. I am not criticizing that behavior, although at the time I was none too happy about it for I was the one who paid all the bills and bought all the clothes. The point is to recognize the difference between what is sacrificially given and what is indifferently shared and used. Jesus made exactly this point when He contrasted what was given to the Temple in Jerusalem by the wealthy who gave from their excess and the widow's mite, who gave all that she had. *"Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.'"* It is easy, is it not, in a congregation for those who have little to assume those who have much are the ones who should give? After all, they've got plenty and the little I have to give won't make any difference whether I give or not! So I won't. [This is] disaster, beloved. Let me remind you, beloved, in case you [see] I am wearing a suit and [think] I am rich. Here is a reality about my wife and me. When we were in seminary we attended a Presbyterian church. What we found out is that on our income which was way below the poverty line, like waaay below, we were amongst the top ten percent of the givers because we tithed. That is a devastating comment against the people in that wealthy church. How could we, living below the poverty line, tithe and be amongst the top ten percent of givers?

Jesus has given to us a model: How to love. It is not a sentimental model. It is extremely practical in living out the reality of our personal dependence upon God. In our cash culture that dependency must be financial as well as other things.

Paul's instruction to the Corinthians with another false approach: that is taxing the rich to give to the poor. At the very heart of what Paul says is the freedom of each one to give or not to give according to their desire. *"And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it."* I appreciated the comment made regarding the Youth Ministry that at the [ministry information] table there will be opportunities for you to donate your time and to donate your resources. Absolutely, freely, no obligation. If you feel prompted by the Lord to give to some ministry, do you know who will be blessed? It will be you and the ministry as well.

Love appeals to the will, calling it to make a free choice to bless the one who is loved. That, by the way, is why it is called grace giving or charity. Returning to 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Paul's message to the bondservants is that they will honor the God who loves them by enabling them to freely give good service to their masters. It is to be freely given, that is without thought or calculation that they might catch the master's eye and curry his favor, gaining the advantage over others. The benefit of their freely given good service is to go to the master, to the employer, and the glory will go to God whether the master or anyone else acknowledges it at the time. Let me close my comments with something Paul wrote to the Ephesians.

*"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service as people pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free."*

Hard words? Yes, they are. These are hard words to listen to; I know they are. They are hard for me to preach. But they happen to be what God said.

Please pray with me: Father in heaven, attitude adjustments, heart work, changing the mind, seeing the world not through the lens of my need but Father through the promise of Your sufficiency. May we take on the attributes of Christ? May we freely give that You might be glorified in all things. We ask this, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.