

“Slavery in the New Testament”
Titus 2:9-10
(Preached at Trinity, March 26, 2023)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, sound doctrine has been at the heart of Paul’s letter to Titus. Sound doctrine was not the focus of Titus and the other elders alone. Sound doctrine is church business. This is Christian business. Sound doctrine leads to Godliness.
2. Sound doctrine must always translate into sound behavior. There are many people who have a high view of doctrine. They will argue every jot and tittle. But their doctrine has little effect upon their lives. Doctrine and practice must never be separated. True doctrine will always instruct a person unto godliness.
3. Paul addresses the subject by directing attention upon several different groups within the church.
Older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and finally, bondservants or slaves. So far, we’ve seen the first four.
This morning I want us to focus on the fourth group—the behavior of slaves.
4. Once again, we are coming face to face with the subject of slavery. Once again, we are troubled by the thought of one man in subjection to another. As Christians we treasure the liberties we have in Christ. In fact, in Christ we enjoy a unique unity that transcends race, sex, and cultural distinctions.
1 Corinthians 12:13 KJV - "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."
Galatians 3:27-28 KJV - "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."
5. But now Paul is giving specific instructions to slaves.
The word used here is δοῦλος – It is a common word used over 120 times in the NT. The NASB sometimes translates it “bond-servant” but most often it is translated “slave.” We need to understand that slavery in the first century was quite different from the 19th century chattel slavery in our country. Slavery in our country was perpetuated by a slave trade in Africa where individuals were forced into slavery through kidnapping, one tribe subjugating another and selling their victims for profit. Paul condemned such enslavement as anti-Christian.
1 Timothy 1:10 NAU - "immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,"
6. Slavery was very common in the 1st century. It was an accepted part of their culture.
 - A. There were an estimated 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire - they probably formed the whole of the work force - free men did not labor.
 - B. They had become slaves as prisoners of war, as condemned men, or through debt. Many were born into slavery. Even some slaves had their own slaves.

- C. Slavery did not involve a dehumanization. Some slaves were highly educated. Some held high government office. There were household slaves where the children were under their tutelage as pedagogues. They were considered members of the household.
- D. Slaves could eventually purchase their freedom, or the master could grant their freedom. Some masters would provide for the freedom of a slave in their will. In Paul's time, almost half the slaves received freedom by the age of thirty.¹
- E. The introduction of Christianity into this culture brought many questions and tensions. Should Christian masters release all of their Christian slaves? Should Christian slaves expect preferential treatment from their Christian masters?
7. While the NT has much to say about slavery, it neither condemns nor justifies the institution of slavery.
It simply recognizes its reality - It focuses mostly on the proper behavior of slaves and masters. The N.T. always focuses upon our transformed lives.
1 Peter 2:18 NAU - "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable."
Ephesians 6:5-7 NAU - "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 eyeservice, 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,"
Colossians 3:22-24 NAU - "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. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."
1 Timothy 6:1 NAU - "All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and *our* doctrine will not be spoken against."
8. Christianity doesn't necessarily change our situation or status of life.
- A. The external areas of our life will remain the same.
1 Corinthians 7:20-22 NAU - "Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 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."
1. Christian salvation won't change the color of your skin. It won't change whether you are male or female. It doesn't change your marital status or your employment.
 2. Rather than focusing on the external condition of life, the Gospel transforms how we live *within* our various conditions.
 3. The point is that a person is equally able to serve Christ in slavery or freedom. He serves Christ whether in a democracy or dictatorship. We must honor God in every condition of life.

¹ Daniel M. Doriani and Richard D. Phillips, *2 Timothy & Titus*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 204.

4. Rather than abolishing slavery, Christianity changed it - The slave is placed upon a new plane - he no longer focuses upon his condition.
- B. The NT maintains a focus on maintaining an eternal mindset.
Colossians 3:2-3 NAU - "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."
1. This doesn't dismiss the importance of our present life.
 - a. It doesn't excuse carelessness or sloth. Paul warned the Thessalonians of some who were neglecting duty and going about as busybodies.
 - b. We have family responsibilities and vocational duties. We have homes to maintain and relationships to care for. And we are not unconcerned about those who rule over us.
 - c. But we maintain a priority of pressing on in holiness while serving our King, Jesus Christ. We are never commanded to make the current political/economic/social conditions our chief priority.
 2. We must always be the salt and light in this world, but we are primarily not of this world.
 3. The primary focus of the church is to evangelize and bring people to a saving knowledge of Christ through the Gospel.
 - a. Only the Christian is able to come under His lordship. We are to make disciples and teach them to obey the commands of our Lord. **Matthew 28:1 NAU** - "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"
 - b. Our chief priority is not to reform the world - the world cannot be reformed. We are looking forward to the New Heavens and New Earth.
- C. We must always maintain a proper balance, a proper perspective.
1. We must maintain a Kingdom priority
Matthew 6:33 KJV - "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."
John 18:36 NAU - "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."
 2. This life is always of secondary importance. We are citizens of another realm.
 - a. If the Christian with cancer makes his recovery his highest priority he ceases to maintain a kingdom priority. Instead he should ask, how can I glorify Christ with my cancer?

- b. If the slave makes his freedom his highest priority, he ceases to maintain a Kingdom priority. Instead he should ask, how can I glorify Christ in my servitude?
Ephesians 6:5 NAU - "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;"
- c. Our life is described as a pilgrimage - we are pilgrims and strangers. This realm is not our ultimate home. We must remain strangers to it.
1 Peter 2:11 NAU - "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."

9. Paul's instruction to slaves in this passage is divided into three points.

- Be submissive – “well-pleasing”
- Be cooperative – “not argumentative”
- Be trustworthy - "not pilfering, but showing all good faith"

This is good counsel for every employee today.

I. Department – The slave should strive to be well-pleasing to his master

A. A slave needs to labor in compliance

1. Paul uses the expression, “well-pleasing.”
The slave need to seek to please his master
2. In most of the Biblical charges of submission to authority obedience to Christ is set as the model.
Ephesians 5:22 NAU - "Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord."
Ephesians 6:5-7 NAU - "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 eyeservice, 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,"
3. Here Paul adds: "so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect."

B. This carries over to our duty to our earthly authorities

1. To the civil authority:
Romans 13:1 NAU - "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities"
2. To ecclesiastical authority”
Hebrews 13:17 NAU - "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account."
3. To familial authority:
Ephesians 5:22 NAU - "Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord."
Ephesians 6:1 NAU - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

4. Richard Philips writes: “A well-functioning workplace requires workers who accept the authority of those placed over them. The same is true in society and the home. Therefore, a Christian worker is not primarily concerned with his own rights and will avoid acts of noncompliance in order to pressure superiors.”²

II. Disposition – The slave should avoid being uncooperative or argumentative

- A. The slave should recognize that the authority of his master was legitimate
 1. He needed to avoid feelings of resentment.
 2. William Gouge wrote in his book, “Domestical Duties”
The mind and opinion of the slave “must be informed and resolved that the place of a master and a servant is lawful and warrantable: that God in general ordained degrees of superiority and inferiority, of authority and subjection: and in particular gave to masters the authority which they have and put servants in that subjection wherein they are. God hath given express commandment unto masters to govern their servants: and unto servants to be subject to their masters.”³
- B. Submission is one of the most difficult things we do
 1. We naturally want to put forth our opinion. We want to press our way. Every pastor has faced those who want to argue over every point.
 2. Some men have argumentative wives.
The Bible does not speak well of them.
Proverbs 21:9 NAU - "It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman."
Proverbs 21:19 NAU - "It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman."
Proverbs 27:15-16 NAU - "A constant dripping on a day of steady rain And a contentious woman are alike; ¹⁶ He who would restrain her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand."

III. Dependability - "not pilfering, but showing all good faith"

- A. This carries the idea of not being trustworthy
 1. Behaving differently when the master is away or when he’s not watching
Ephesians 6:5-6 NAU - "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 eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."
Colossians 3:22 NAU - "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."
 2. Loyalty is always a high virtue.

² Daniel M. Doriani and Richard D. Phillips, *2 Timothy & Titus*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 207.

³ William Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, Puritan Reprints, (www.puritanreprints.com, 2006), 434-435.

- B. Christian regeneration changes how we interact in this world.
1. The slave was to demonstrate faithfulness toward his master. The master was to treat his slaves with respect.
 2. William Hendriksen writes:
 “The ill-will, dishonesty, and laziness of the slave would be replaced by willing service, integrity, and industry; the cruelty and brutality of the master, by considerateness and love. And a new and gloriously transformed society would replace the old.”⁴

Conclusion:

1. Christianity is transforming. Too many well-meaning Christians today expend a lot of energy trying to reform the world around them—to get people to start behaving like Christians. That’s like trying to get a cat to act like a cow. A cat will starve to death before eating straw. And a cow will not eat meat. Lost people are of a totally different nature.
2. Only the Gospel can transform lives. This is the meaning of Isaiah’s words:
Isaiah 65:25 NAU - "The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain," says the LORD."
3. Christians slaves and masters put on display God’s redeeming grace. Likewise Christian employers and Christian workers.
 John MacArthur: “Nowhere in Scripture is rebellion or revolution justified in order to gain freedom, opportunity, or economic, social, or political rights. The emphasis is rather on the responsibility of slaves to serve their human masters faithfully and fully, in order to reflect the transforming power of God in their lives.”⁵

⁴ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 6:173.

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Titus*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 98.