

Honoring Masters

Call to Worship: Psalm 89:7-18

1st Scripture: Ephesians 6:5-9

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:1-2

Hymn #35- *Immortal, Invisible*

Hymn #493- *Who is On the Lord's Side?*

Hymn #494- *Jesus, Master Whose I am*

Introduction

We've moved into a section of Paul's letter to Timothy, where he is exhorting Timothy to ensure that particular people are properly honored in the local church. And there are three groups of people that he addresses to this end. We have already considered the first two of these groups, namely, true widows and elders. This morning then, we move on to consider the last of these three groups, "masters," who are to be honored by their bondservants.

As we consider then this last group, we'll examine Paul's charge under the following three headings:

- 1) We will consider who exactly these masters and bondservants are.
- 2) We will consider the specific ways in which bondservants are to honor their masters.
- 3) We will translate all of this into a legitimate means of applying these things to us.

I. Who are masters and bondservants?

Simply put, the term "bondservants" is a more delicate way of stating "slaves." However, because of the obvious negative connotations that are attached to our modern day understanding of "slavery," and especially in light of the terrible circumstances surrounding the reality of slavery in the history of our own nation, it would definitely be better stated, "bondservants," because those whom Paul is addressing in this text are not to be confused with the harsh slave masters of our past history (which would be more akin to the way, in which, the Egyptians enslaved and oppressed the Jews, during the time of Moses).

That said, it is important that we clearly define the slavery which was permitted (not ideal, but permitted, nonetheless) in Scripture, if for no other reason, than to shut down those who would grossly misrepresent God's Word, as that which advocates and supports slavery, in the wicked sense, in which, it was practiced here in this country, prior to the Civil War.

All of that said, we can say that, by and large, the permitted form of slavery addressed in the New Testament, was a voluntary form of slavery. Now, what do I mean by this? I mean that it did not involve the stealing and selling of individuals for profit. Rather, those who became slaves (bondservants; and there were many who did so, during the time Paul was writing), had voluntarily sold themselves into slavery for the sake of receiving some form of desired benefit from the master, to whom they sold themselves. In other words, they willfully, agreeably and contractually gave up their liberty, in exchange for particular benefits and advantages. Such benefits would include, most obviously, financial help, debt relief, housing benefits, some form of protection by a high official...etc.

Now, there were certainly occasions where a thief or a criminal, who was caught and incapable of paying the fine due their victim, was sold into slavery, as a means of paying restitution for the crime they committed (Ex. 22:1-3). And in the Old Covenant theocratic nation of Israel, when Israel had entered the Promised Land, at times, they were permitted to take slaves from among the heathen nations (Lev. 25:44-46), but we must keep in mind, God was judging those nations, and it was much more preferable to be a slave (among the covenant people of God, and under the oracles of God - ex: The Gibeonites) than to be killed for your idolatrous practices. And so, in that sense, slavery was actually a benefit.

Anyway, needless to say, the Scriptures never advocate slavery, in the sense of taking a person unwillfully, and selling them to someone else. In fact, there was another term for that particular action, and it was called kidnapping. And the penalty for that crime was death. Notice, in Deuteronomy 24:7, we are told, "If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you." And again, in Exodus 21:16, we are told, "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death." And so, slavery, as it was practiced in our country (and in virtually all others at various times), with a slave trade, was never, ever condoned by God, or by the Word of God. And, in fact, even voluntary slaves, in Israel, unless they chose, themselves, to make their slavery permanent, were, by law, to be freed after six years of service, no matter what. On the seventh year, they were free (and that, not

without additional resources from the master, so that they could stand on their feet as they began their life of freedom). [Ex. 21:2ff; Deut. 15:12-13; Lev. 25:44-55]

And so, the slavery, as here understood in Scripture, involved an individual, who for the sake of some advantage or benefit (most often financial, in nature) willingly sold himself (and his abilities and services) into the hands of a master. To this end, even some Christians had slaves, which is why Paul gives instructions to Christian masters, as well, calling them to treat their slaves in a manner that adorns the gospel.

Ephesians 6:9 - "And you, masters, do the same things to them (bondservants), giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."

Colossians 4:1 - "Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."

Finally, let me just add one more thing, before we move into our second main heading. Generally, those Christians, who were slaves/bondservants, were already slaves prior to their conversion. In other words, they were already in the process of fulfilling the contract that they had made with their masters. And so, a legitimate question arose when they came to Christ. "What do those who are physical slaves do, now that they were spiritually free in Christ? Should they simply walk away from their physical slavery?" Well, no. Paul here (and elsewhere) commands that they must fulfill their pre-existing obligations (and even more so, with a better heart and a godly attitude), even as Christian witnesses to their masters and to others. However, that said, those who were presently free, were charged to remain free, and not to sell off their liberty, going forward. And the church would certainly help those who were struggling, to get back on their feet, so that they could maintain their liberty, and freely serve Christ. And so, again, the ideal was to be free, but some were already bound to a previous commitment, and they needed to honor that commitment unto the Lord. And because becoming a bondservant was a very common thing at that time, it would not have been unusual at all, for there to have been several in the churches who were bound to such commitments. Needless to say, you can appreciate how important it was for Paul to address slavery then, from a biblical standpoint.

1 Corinthians 7:21-24- Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called."

And so, brethren, nowhere in Scripture is slavery, as it is understood today, approved and supported by God. Indeed, the very opposite; the liberty that Christ has brought for those who are naturally slaves to sin, is a grand picture of what God ultimately desires in all cases, and for all people. And that which was condoned (but not ideal) in Scripture, in fulfillment of pre-existing conditions, had nothing to do with involuntary servitude. Rather, becoming a slave was willful, based upon an agreement that in some significant way benefitted the slave.

Well, having a clearer understanding of who Paul is addressing as bondservants and masters, we are better equipped then to move on to consider the specific instructions that he here gives to Timothy and the church at Ephesus.

II. The specific ways in which bondservants are to honor their masters

"Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed" (vs. 1).

This first instruction then, is given as a general statement to all who are bondservants, regardless of the spiritual condition of their masters. And again, we see right from the outset that Paul is speaking to those who are "under the yoke." These are individuals who have come into Christianity, already as bondservants.

And what then is the instruction? Bondservants are to count their masters as worthy of all honor. They are to respect them in both their attitude and service. They are not to speak negatively about them to others. They are to hold the wellbeing of their masters in high regard, doing everything to prosper them, in all of their labor. They are to serve with rigor, seeking the good advantage of their masters in every way, while they are bound to them. Indeed, the Gospel does not free them from this obligation, but rather, it further compels them to fulfill it with the highest degree of respect and integrity, all the more as a testimony to the gospel. That's why Paul

adds this sobering statement of consequence, "so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed."

Christianity was to be seen as a religion of substance that gets down to changing the very inner workings of the heart and mind. Its power is to be observed in a changed life that flies right in the face of the natural man's self-glorifying tendencies. It is a religion; indeed a reality and a relationship with the living God, in union with the living Christ, which compels the Christian to seek out the best for others, as an adornment to the gospel. And contrary to this, to cast aside one's integrity; to make the grace of God cheap, which comes through the expense of the precious, shed blood of Christ, is to give cause to blasphemy. It is to distort the glory of God, which He has so graciously attached to His people, leading others to blaspheme God and His Word/truth. And so, the bondservant must all the more faithfully strive to honor his word, in accordance with his voluntary commitment to serve his master, for the benefits that he has received (and probably continues to receive). Indeed, God can be honored or dishonored, glorified/praised or blasphemed, on account of the actions/words of those who claim they know Him in truth. And so, Paul here states, to make sure that the bondservants, all the more, give all honor to their masters, doing all to fulfill their obligations to their masters, both in the inward man (including the motives and the attitude) and the outward man (in the words and the actions).

But then, Paul gives further instructions concerning those who serve *Christian* masters. You see, Paul knows that the natural tendency of man (of even Christian man) would be to seek to take advantage of the calling and compassion of other Christians. He knows too well that bondservants of Christian masters would easily relax their services and commitments, taking advantage of the brotherhood. He knows that it would be all too easy to despise Christian masters, charging them with worldliness or material motives, should they require hard work from their Christian bondservants. And so, Paul adds this second instruction, as well:

"And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved." (vs. 2a).

Notice, all the more, Paul provides an additional motivation for giving all honor to Christian masters; for serving them with rigor and even Joy, because the masters, who are

benefitted by the service, are believers and beloved of the Lord. In other words, rather than despise Christian masters, with whom the bondservants had willfully contracted; rather, than viewing the master's expectations of fulfilling the contract, as unloving or worldly in some sense; rather than expecting the Christian master to relax his hand on the bondservants, the bondservants ought to rejoice, in that, they are in a particular position for serving a fellow believer, who is beloved of God. They can particularly benefit those whom God has set His love upon. In other words, it should be seen as a special honor and a privilege to be a bondservant of a believer, if one is already bound in some sense. The blessings that fall upon the master, who is a fellow believer, fall upon one, who shares in the greatest and eternal blessing, which all of God's people share, in the inheritance of Christ, and that, in itself, should be a great motive to honor and serve the master with all diligence, rather than despise him as a brother to whom you are yoked in bondage.

Finally, Paul concludes, "Teach and exhort these things" (The broader context of the whole letter, and then, the closer context of honoring widows, elders and masters).

III. A legitimate means of applying these things to us

How then do we apply these instructions to us? What value, do instructions concerning slaves and masters, have to us, where such a practice is not generally utilized in our culture? Well, beyond the shadow of any doubt, these principles would very much apply to the work force, and how we conduct ourselves at our jobs, in the service of those who hire us. While we are free and no man's slave, we do sell our expertise and our labors, to those who are able to use them for their own business benefit. And to this end, we can certainly draw from these instructions.

1) First then, we ought to see these instructions as a compelling charge, brethren, to honor and respect our bosses, and to do all to prosper them (with the right attitude, heart and actions), for as long as we are on the clock. And we ought to remind ourselves, daily, that our conduct at work can either adorn the gospel or provoke others to blaspheme our God and His doctrine. Brethren, when you are at your job, you are more than just a worker, seeking to bring home a paycheck. You are a representative of Christ, and your testimony there, for good or bad, paints a

picture of Christianity to those who are around you. Consider how many hours we spend at our jobs? Ought we to think for a moment that such valuable time is insignificant to God and to our Christian witness? Indeed, in many cases, factoring in sleeping, eating, household chores and leisure, work is one of the most significant phases of Christian ministry, for a significant portion of the Christian life. It counts. It means so much, brethren. It is a missionfield of sorts, where you are either adorning or bringing reproach to the gospel of Christ and the glory of God. God has ordained all of the circumstances surrounding your job; the people you work for, the people you work with, the surrounding challenges and difficulties...etc; He has ordained them as an essential environment, within which, you are called to live out your Christianity. And much of your witness will be tied to, simply how well, and with what integrity, attitude and dignity, you perform your job.

Are you stealing time from your boss? Are you gossiping with others about your boss? What is the demeanor that surrounds you at work? Do you leave the fragrance of Christ or the fragrance of the world at your job? Do people see a difference in you... In how you speak, how you work, what types of things you laugh at, how you use your time...etc? It is ministry, brethren. Are we all prone to forgetting this? Sure. But, let's lay hold of the grace of God in Christ, and re-evaluate our conduct at work. Let's make changes where necessary, confess sin where necessary, seek forgiveness from co-workers where necessary, adjust our work habits, attitudes and life patterns where necessary...etc. What you are at church or at home, alone, does not define you. Christianity is a "worldview." Christ is to reign over every area of our lives. Your job is a ministry unto Christ, and unto the glory (and praise) or blasphemy of God. Make it count!

2) Let us beware of taking advantage of our Christian brethren. We are all well aware of the sanctifying work that God is doing in all of our hearts, and sometimes, it can be too easy to see this as a means of securing our own benefit. Christians, generally, will err on the side of compassion and charity. That is a wonderful reflection of the love of Christ that is in them. But, let us not take advantage of one another; let us not put our brethren in difficult and uncomfortable positions, so as to serve our own ambitions. This would apply to the work that we might do for a brother/sister in the Lord. And this could apply to many other situations, such

as making careless financial decisions, that would see the church as a financial/material nest egg, should things not work out. To be sure, the church is here to help. We want to assist those who really have needs. But, it should always be the attitude of our hearts, to be a "giver" and not a "taker," (to serve, rather than to be served) whenever possible. We ought to go out of our way, far out, to ensure that we are not giving the perception that we are taking advantage of the brethren, in any sense. We ought to strive to be "burden reducers" and not "burden increasers."

3) Let us ever be about desiring and rejoicing in the prosperity of our brethren, and not despising them. That is not always an easy thing to do, but we must remember that they are fellow believers and partakers of the gospel. They are beloved in and by Christ. [III. Adopting the attitude that we have toward the prosperity of our own children]

4) To the unbeliever, see that your greatest bondage, is not to your job or anything else, but to your sin. What gives Christians great joy, even in a world of much toil, much suffering and much evil, is the redemption that we have in Christ! We have a freedom that far exceeds; that infinitely exceeds, the boundaries of this short, brief life. We are now bondservants (blessed slaves) of Christ, who is not ashamed to call us His brethren!

Repent and seek Him, while He may be found! He is your only hope!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25