

## Ephesians 6:5-9

### Introduction

This morning, we come to the conclusion of a section that Paul began all the way back in chapter five verse fifteen.

<sup>5:15</sup>**WATCH CAREFULLY THEREFORE HOW YOU WALK,**

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**NOT** as unwise

**BUT** as wise, <sup>5:16</sup>buying up the time, because the days are evil.

<sup>5:17</sup>Because of this, do **NOT** be foolish,

**BUT** understand what the will of the Lord is.

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<sup>5:18</sup>And do **NOT** get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation,

**BUT** be filled in the Spirit...

<sup>5:19</sup>*speaking* to one another with psalms and hymns...

*singing and making melody*... to the Lord...

<sup>5:20</sup>*giving thanks always*...

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<sup>5:21</sup>**submitting** to one another in the fear of Christ,

<sup>5:22</sup>wives to your own husbands...

<sup>5:25</sup>(Husbands, love your wives...)

<sup>6:1</sup>Children, obey your parents...

<sup>6:4</sup>(Fathers, do not provoke your children...)

<sup>6:5</sup>Slaves, obey your fleshly lords...

<sup>6:9</sup>(Lords... give up threatening...)

So this last exhortation to the slaves is still part of a much bigger picture. Once again, Paul isn't just concerned with rules and regulations. Paul is concerned that we should *all* understand what the will of the Lord is – His gracious, saving plan for the uniting of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in Him (1:9-10). Paul is concerned that we should *all* understand this will so that we can *all live* joyfully and wisely in light of it – so that we might *all* be truly filled in the Spirit. So how is “even” a slave to live in light of God's will for the summing up of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him? How is “even” a *slave* to live in light of the *freedom* that he's been given in Christ (Eph. 1-3)?

It was helpful for me to learn a little about slavery in the time of Paul. When we hear the word “slavery” we might think automatically of beatings, and cruelty – and these things certainly happened. Under Roman law, the head of the household had “complete control over all slaves owned in his family, the power of punishment by whipping and by confinement... and the right [to execute] the death penalty” (Westermann; quoted in Lincoln). So in this sense, there's no comparison whatsoever between the relationship of slaves to masters in ancient Rome, and employees to employers in modern America. But on the other hand, slavery could very often look like our modern “employment.”

“One-third of the population of Greece and Italy was enslaved. The work of these slaves covered the whole range of activities in the ancient world—from privileged positions in the household of the emperor to working in the mines. In between came such work as the civil service, medical care, teaching, accountancy, business, domestic work, and agricultural employment. . . many slaves in the Greco-Roman world enjoyed more favorable living conditions than many free laborers. Contrary to the [idea] that everyone was trying to avoid slavery at all costs, it is clear that some people actually sold themselves into slavery in order to climb socially, to obtain particular employment open only to slaves, and to enjoy a better standard of living than they had experienced as free persons. Being a slave had the benefit of providing a certain personal social security.”  
(Lincoln)

Paul is writing in a culture where slavery “had” to be, and where to give slaves their freedom would in many cases have been itself a form of cruelty. So Paul’s *point* here isn’t the rightness or the wrongness of slavery, but rather: How should slaves *live out, in the context of their slavery*, God’s saving will for the uniting of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him? You see how the truth of the Gospel applies literally *everywhere*. There is no place in all of life where God’s will does not apply. That’s a huge comfort, because it means we’re *never* left to our own devices – to guess or wonder. God’s will, as it’s been fully revealed in the pages of Scripture is fully sufficient to guide us and *command* us in every imaginable part of life. But this brings with it a sacred responsibility – a responsibility to always *understand* what the will of the Lord is in the context of every single aspect of our living in this world. But how many times are there when we either don’t care, or we don’t *want* to know? How many times are there when we fail to actively evaluate and ask ourselves how the power and beauty of the Gospel, and how the absolute supremacy of Christ *applies* in this or that area of our lives? One of the most radical and authentic signs that we really do understand what the will of the Lord is, and that we really are filled in the Spirit is that we *submit* to the authorities in our lives in the fear of *Christ*. After writing to the Christian wives, and then to the Christian children, Paul writes now to the slaves:

### **I. “Slaves, obey your fleshly lords”**

At first, this seems very, very wrong – some commentators are convinced that it is. How can a Christian, a son or daughter of the living God, with free access to the holy of holies be called a *slave* of any man? We’re not talking about husbands and *wives*, or parents and *children* now. We’re talking about masters and *slaves*. How can a Christian who is not only made in the image of God, but now part of the “one new man” that Christ has created – how can this Christian be called a *slave* of any human being? On the other hand, how can the slave’s master still be called his “*lord*”? The Greek word for “lord” is “kurios.” It can refer to any kind of master, but in the Bible, it comes to refer *almost* exclusively to the *one Lord*, Jesus Christ. Paul says in chapter four: “[There is] *one Lord* [kurios], one faith, one baptism. . .” (4:5-6). In other places where Paul gives advice to slaves, he refers to their masters with a different Greek word (“despotes”; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Tit. 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18). But here he uses the word, “kurios.” How can Paul write to any group of *Christians* with words like these: “*Slaves, obey your fleshly lords*”? Wouldn’t Paul’s time be better spent urging the abolition of slavery or at least praying for that day to come? Is Paul betraying the very Gospel that he just preached in the first three chapters? Is he admitting

that *sometimes* the Gospel remains just a theory – impossible to be practically worked out in real life – until life changes? In fact, he’s saying just the opposite.

When Paul says, “slaves, obey your fleshly lords,” he’s already setting us up for a tour de force (for a magnificent display) of what God’s Gospel *really* is! Outside of the Bible, the focus of attention is universally on the master and how the master should rule his slaves and make sure they obey. (O’Brien; cf. Lincoln) But here, Paul speaks directly *to* the slave and exhorts him as a full and equal member of the body of Christ – just like he does the children and the wives. Outside of the Bible, the slave had only one master. But here, Paul clearly assumes that there are two: “Slaves, obey your *fleshly* lords.” Paul is not compromising the Gospel. So he must be saying instead that the *way slaves* live out their *freedom* and their *exalted status* in Christ *is* actually by continuing in *obedience* to their fleshly *lords*. This is the beautiful “upside down” and “inside out” of the Gospel. “Slaves, obey your fleshly lords...”

## II. with *fear and trembling*... AS TO CHRIST...

**NOT according to eye-service as people pleasers but AS SLAVES OF CHRIST, doing the will of will of God...**

**rendering service AS TO THE LORD and NOT to men**

Three times, Paul drives his point home: “*As* to Christ... *as* slaves of Christ... *as* to the Lord.” The slave was to do all of his work as if Christ Himself had commanded it. Now think about how many mundane and trivial and maybe even humiliating things a slave might be told to do by his master. Paul isn’t assuming here a Christian master! And yet no matter how mundane, or how trivial, or how apparently pointless it might be, the slave was to obey for the approval and the praise of Christ alone.

Paul says two times that the slave is to obey and render service: “*Not* according to eye-service as people pleasers... *not* to men.” “Eye service” is when you serve in order to be noticed by the eye of someone else – in this case, the eye of the human master. Eye service is when you obey in order to please people – in order to be appreciated and praised *by* people. In other words, we might do what we’re told with self-serving motives – in order to avoid punishment, or just hoping to get a promotion and work our way up the ladder. But Paul says that when we obey, when we do what we’re told, it’s not the human master or boss that we should have in mind, but rather, *just Christ*. That’s why Paul can call the slave (or the employee of today) to obey “*with fear and trembling*” – “with an attitude of reverence and awe *in the presence of God*.” (O’Brien). As employees today, we have the “freedom” to quit our jobs (although sometimes in light of financial constraints we might not feel so free). But as long as we remain employed, we should view ourselves in a sense as “slaves” – slaves who do what we’re told not for the eyes of any fleshly employer, but only for the eyes of our “*kurios*” – our one *Lord*, Jesus Christ.

Paul uses what’s really an amazing play on words: “*Slaves*, obey your *lords*... *as slaves* of Christ... rendering service as to the *Lord*.” See how Paul weaves together the earthly, with the heavenly – the mundane, “up here” with the sacred? And so we see that, truly, *all* of life is sacred. That’s really Paul’s point. *All* of life should be lived “with fear and trembling.” O’Brien writes: “The performance of [our] earthly tasks is related to his rule over [our] lives. Ultimately, then, the distinction between the sacred and the secular breaks down. Any and every task,

however menial, falls within the sphere of his lordship and is done in order to please him.” Hendriksen uses the illustration of a man who was carrying a load of bricks on his wheel-barrow. When he was asked what he was doing, his answer was, “I am building a cathedral for the Lord.”

This is a whole different way of thinking than many of us are used to – and yet it’s truly the only way of thinking that shows we *understand* what the will of the Lord is. Do we remember what the will of the Lord is? – It’s the supremacy of Christ in all the world. So when the slave gives obedience to his fleshly lord *as to Christ, as a slave of Christ, and as to the Lord* – then Paul can only conclude that he is “**doing the will of God.**” There’s not a single moment of our lives that’s not an opportunity to be doing the will of God because there’s not a single moment of our lives that’s not an opportunity to be sanctifying Christ as Lord and Master (as **kurios**) in our hearts (1 Pet. 3:15). For the Christian, all of life is sacred because all of life is to be lived as the *slave* of Christ. *That’s* the real meaning of Paul’s words in Colossians three:

✓ Colossians 3:17 — *Whatever* you do, in *word* or *deed*, do *everything* in *the name of the Lord Jesus*.

Now remember that the uniting of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him, is not just God’s will – it is God’s *saving and redeeming and liberating* will. So how is it that by giving obedience to his human master as to Christ, the slave is actually living out his *freedom* in Christ? “Slaves, obey your fleshly lords...”

**III.** with fear and trembling, **in the sincerity of your heart**, as to Christ,  
not according to eye-service as people pleasers but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God **from the soul**,  
**with goodwill** rendering service as to the Lord and not to men

The Christian slave is able to obey his master in the *sincerity of his heart, from the soul, and with good will*. That’s a miracle. *That’s* freedom. It’s a freedom the world can’t ever give, but a freedom that truly matters more than any other kind in the world. “Sincerity of heart” means without any ulterior motives – a “simple goodness, which gives itself without reserve” (BAGD). “From the soul” means “with an inner motivation that is wholehearted and unreserved” (Lincoln). “With goodwill” means gladly – with enthusiasm, zeal, and eagerness. Lincoln says: “For slaves to have their *hearts* and *souls* in doing the will of God in their work... make[s] possible an experience of inner independence within their situation.” So here’s the crazy, amazing, totally upside-down reality: The *slave* may be more truly free than the king. And not just in theory, but in actual experience. Think of the millionaire who’s retired and has the ability to spend his time and money doing whatever he wishes – whether it’s work, or play, or relaxation. The *slave* may be more truly free than this because he’s learned the secret of performing even the most mundane task *with all of his heart*. And that secret is this: **Slaves**, obey your **lords... as slaves of Christ... rendering service as to the Lord**. Because all of life is sacred, then that means that in all of life, we can be truly *free* – free to obey, and do what we’re told, and perform even the most menial required task with all our heart. It’s crazy, but it’s true. If it’s true for the slave, then how can it not be true for all of us – and especially for all of us who are “on the job” (whether at home or at work)?

We have the privilege of embracing every day, and every circumstance, in whatever situation, on whatever job, as an opportunity to live with all of our hearts *for our Lord (our “kurios”)* – who has redeemed us and made us His own. That’s already wonderful news. But then there’s this:

**IV. “knowing that whatever good each person does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”**

The “good,” here, isn’t some special “good deed.” The “good” is *whatever* we do “as to Christ.” That throws the doors wide open. *Whatever* we do “as slaves of Christ,” *whatever* we do having sanctified Christ as Lord in our hearts, this He will be faithful to *reward*. Think of that! So when a mother of toddlers cleans the house or changes a diaper *as a true “slave of Christ,”* she may know that these things will one day be rewarded! When the husband and father goes to work and sits at a desk pushing papers or watching a computer screen, or moves boxes, or loads trucks *as a true “slave of Christ,”* he may know that even these things will one day be rewarded! This is amazing grace! When no one else notices, and there’s never any human applause, the Lord sees everything and keeps a record in His book.

*Whatever* good *each person* does, whatever anyone ever does *as to the Lord, this* he will receive back *from the Lord*. Do we believe this, brothers and sisters? Do we believe God’s Word? I’m reminded of what the writer of Hebrews says:

- ✓ Hebrews 6:10 (NASB) — For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name...

Lincoln concludes, “No good deed will [ever] go unrecompensed.” Hendriksen says, “No good deed is [ever] done in vain.” And so now we can think of these familiar words in a whole different light: “Only one life; ’twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.” (C.T. Studd) Only now we know that what’s done for Christ can be, and should be – everything. Every moment of our life can be of everlasting value because every moment of our life can be lived sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts. And so our whole life, every moment of every day, holds before us the promise of reward. That’s amazing grace!

“Whatever good each person does,” Paul says, “this he will receive back from the Lord, *whether slave or free.*” When the Day of Judgment comes, those who were slaves will stand side by side with those who were masters, and their reward will be no less. In fact, it may be the faithful slave whose reward is the greatest of all. And so now Paul turns to the masters:

**V. “And lords, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that both their Lord and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”**

It’s like Paul says this: “Masters, if you want to know what the Gospel means for you, then just read what I said to the slaves.” You can see how eventually, the Gospel abolishes even the institution of slavery. But *before* it does that, it’s most *powerful* work is to redeem both the slave and the master. It’s most *powerful* work is to make both the master and the slave, slaves *together* of one Lord. That’s the miracle working power of the Gospel. So just like the slave obeys only “as to Christ,” so also the master must rule only “*as to Christ.*” “And lords,” Paul says, “do the

same things to them, *giving up threatening, knowing that both their Lord and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.*” The master’s days are no more sacred than the slave’s; the “boss’s” days are no more sacred than the employee – because both are called to live with all of their hearts as slaves of the same Lord. And so the wonderful Gospel reality that guides both the slave and the master is the same Gospel reality that guides all of us here today (1 Cor. 7:20-22). In whatever condition we have been called, we may embrace every day, and every circumstance—no matter how trivial or mundane—as an opportunity to live with all of our hearts for our **Master** (our “kurios”), who has redeemed us and made us His own – *knowing* that one day we will be *rewarded* for everything we’ve ever, *ever* done *as unto Him*. That’s **AMAZING GRACE**.