

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

You recognize these words... don't you(?)... They come from one of the most famous speeches in American history - the Gettysburg Address. President Abraham Lincoln delivered it on November 19, 1863... eliciting outrage... against one of the darkest stains on our American history – slavery. And as we look back on those times today... it isn't simply our nation that should be ashamed. ... An ugly blemish has been cast on American Christianity. Because in the “Christian South”... faithful church members (and even pastors) were buying... selling... trading... using... (and sometimes) abusing slaves... who were forcibly brought to our shores from Africa.

How in the world could someone who identifies with the Christian faith... (which promotes freedom... liberty... equality) either support ... participate -in... – or be indifferent – to the pain and suffering that slavery brought to fellow human beings? ... You might scratch your head and wonder. ... But let me give you something else that might perplex you just as much (if not more.)

They used Scripture to justify themselves! ... Now YOU TELL ME... if the verses that we come to today (in our study through Timothy)... don't appear to give us the chilling impression that GOD SUPPORTS SLAVERY.

1 Timothy 6:1-2

Why does Paul tell slaves to endure such a horrific institution as slavery. Paul! Why didn't you condemn it outright? ... Instead Paul says the

unsaved master was to be duly respected as master... by the slave who was a believer. In verse two Paul says those who worked for believing masters generally had a much better situation than those working for unsaved masters... but they were still to act properly and do their work well. ... Why such indifference... (if not out-right support of it)... Paul?

Believers of the “Christian South”... before the “Proclamation of Emancipation”... (making it against the law to own slaves)... also had other verses of Scripture that they turned to.

Colossians 3:22-4:1 (ESV)

²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. ^{4:1} Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

“Hey, Christian Slave... Go ahead and take your abuse!”

And then there is Ephesian 6:5-8 (which was EARLIER written to this same church.)

Ephesians 6:5-8 (ESV)

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

“Just be a ‘Good Little Slave’... suffer injustice but let God reward you...”

What are you and I to do with such passages that are in our sacred Scripture...? Was it a mistake to include them as part of God's Holy Word? ... Can we take a knife to them and cut them out? ... Can we ignore them... since slavery has been abolished today...? Were the Christian slave owners of the Civil War era justified by these Scriptures?

Because we are studying through Paul's letter to Timothy... I am not going to ignore 1 Timothy 6:1-2. There are three MAIN questions that I think we need to explore... as we give our attention to these verses in 1 Timothy. ...

Question #1. DOES GOD SUPPORT SLAVERY? ... Question #2.

(Since we are discussing slavery) DOES SLAVERY EXIST TODAY? ...

(And) **Question #3. DOES THIS PASSAGE HAVE ANY RELEVANCE FOR YOU AND I?**

OK... we have quite a bit to tackle... so we better get started.

In order to answer question #1. Does God support slavery(?)... I think it would be helpful for us to start by discussing slavery *in history*. ... (YOU SEE)... If we only use... (as our frame of reference)... American slavery – which was AFTER Paul wrote these passages... it is easy for us to condemn Paul for writing what he did. ... I want to consider what Paul had in mind at the time he wrote this... This might help us understand why Paul did not outright condemn the horrible institution of slavery. ... We will look at a few other Scriptures – which reveal the clearest answer to our question (“*Does God support slavery?*”)

World history is filled with various types of slavery... and for most of us today... we only think of one kind. Whenever we hear the word “slavery.” ... Definite images pop up in our minds that represent abuses and

injustices. ... But although many of these images may be historically accurate (in certain contexts) – a large number of forms of slavery were NOT this way.

For example... we can see a system of Hebrew servanthood that was set up for impoverished Israelites to become servants. ... This servanthood was designed to provide for poorer Israelites and their families. Even though Deuteronomy 15:1–18 tells us that God desires that none of His people are poor... He nevertheless makes provision for those in poverty... BECAUSE poverty became a reality in such a sinful and broken world. Leviticus 25:35–43 helps us understand more about God’s perspective on slavery:

Leviticus 25:35-43 (ESV)

³⁵ *“If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. ³⁶ Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. ³⁷ You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. ³⁸ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. ³⁹ “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: ⁴⁰ he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. ⁴¹ Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. ⁴² For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.*

This passage describes a system of servanthood in Israel whereby someone could sell himself into slavery in order to escape poverty. (And as you saw)... such an individual was to be treated not as a slave but as a hired servant... a worker. ... The individual would basically enter into a

contractual agreement with an employer... working until he could establish himself as a free and full citizen again. And God instituted another regulation. In Exodus 21:2-4... we read that according to the Law... Slaves were to be given their freedom every seven years.

Now there were certainly unjust and abusive slaveholders among God's people. Israel's sin was... after all... apparent throughout its history. However... cruelty was not God's intention for slavery in Israel... and the slavery that God was regulating by the Law... was vastly different from the pre-Civil War slavery in the southern United States.

Now let's fast forward to Roman slavery (during which Paul wrote his letters.) This too was vastly different. ... Slavery was deeply ingrained into the Roman Empire and its economy. ... Some scholars estimate that over one-third of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves—that's approximately 50 or 60 million individuals!

Out of those 50–60 million slaves... there were a variety of different practices of slavery in this era of history. (Here are a few of the differences from American slavery.) Most Roman slaves were like employees and they did a variety of different kinds of work (as employees do today): teachers... craftsmen... lawyers... physicians... managers... cooks... and even government officials. ... Many slaves owned slaves themselves.

(LISTEN!)... In Roman society you were one of four things: a wealthy aristocrat... a soldier... a slave... or a hired day laborer. This was the social ladder of status... from highest to lowest. Notice that slaves were NOT the lowest rung of the social ladder. Day-laborers were. ...Why? ... Because they did not have ANY security or guarantee for the basic necessities of

life. They enjoyed their freedom – but the price was a very uncertain future. Slaves had their food... clothes... and housing provided for them. In order to gain Roman citizenship and thus enter into Roman society... many people would sell themselves into slavery. Many slaves were released by the time they were 30 years of age... having saved their salaries... (yes... MANY were paid salaries) from which they eventually bought their freedom.

(Now)... I need to be careful! ... Despite the countless numbers of humane practices of slavery... I don't want to paint an idealistic picture of slavery. ... We all know that a slave was still a slave — marginalized... powerless... and often prone to disgrace or insult. ... While numerous (and perhaps most) slaves were salaried employees with great responsibilities... others were subjected to grueling labor and harsh treatment... including sexual abuse. ... No. I never want to glorify slavery. Slavery could be and sometimes was extremely degrading and destructive.

But what I do want to distinguish... is that there was quite a difference between the slavery of Paul's day... and what usually comes to our minds about slavery that is based on what we know from our American history.

Slavery was the first century work-force. The system was not perfect... but it was made the Roman economy workable. Most of the abuses came from the evil hearts of men – NOT from the institution itself. (AND PLEASE HEAR ME!) Such abuses can be found in any economic system – whether it is slavery... a monarchy... an oligarchy... communism... or (what I believe is the BEST human system) – capitalism. ... BUT - A capitalist banker or businessman can be every bit as cruel as a slave owner!

If we are so concerned that Paul did not condemn slavery... why aren't we just as prone to condemn capitalism...? (Abuse foisted onto others – out of the hearts of evil men – sometimes occurs... just as it did with Rome's economic system.) ... Don't misunderstand me... please. I think our system is the fairest... but it isn't an economic system we need to condemn. It is the mistreatment of others within any system. (It seems as though Paul understood this.)

Because of our fallen world... every economic system **DOES** (and will continue) to mistreat people – until Jesus returns to the Earth and establishes His PERFECT kingdom. ... So God had Paul go right for the heart of the matter. He denounced the mistreatment of others within the economic system of his day.

Does God support slavery? ... God doesn't support any world system of economy. He regulates human behavior in any system... until the only non-sinful... abusive... righteous... rule comes... at Jesus' return. Look how he regulates slavery in His Holy Word.

- **Ex. 21:2-6** – Jewish slaves could not be held for more than six years... unless they voluntarily chose to remain.
- **Ex. 21:26-27** – Those who came into slavery with a wife and children could take them along if they leave.
- **Ex. 21:27** – Slaves who were abused by their masters were to be set free.
- **Ex. 21:20** – Slaves had various civil rights; you could not murder your slave.

Because God only regulates human behavior in our sinful world-systems... we still might be left with the question: “Were the Christians of the American South (indeed) justified to own slaves?” Is it a matter of “Yes you can have them... just don't mistreat them...”? ... Biblically... is slavery OK?

(Believe it or not... there is such an easy answer to this.) We know that God condemns slavery because the Bible denounces human trafficking.

Exodus 21:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ *“Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.*

Kidnapping a slave is punishable by death... and that death penalty applies to the one selling the slave and the one buying the slave.

Now... after reading **THAT** ... *“How do you think God feels about the American slavery that kidnapped people from Africa...? ... Christians from the South seemed to overlook that verse. ... And here is another one.*

(This one comes from the New Testament – this very letter to Timothy!)

1 Timothy 1:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ *understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,*

Paul explicitly mentions (alongside murder... sexual immorality... and homosexuality)... the sin of enslavement. The word “enslavers” in the original is a little more graphic. It literally means “human-traffickers”... (a “man-stealer” or a “slave-dealer.”) ... Anyone who kidnaps people in order to sell them as slaves is “lawless and rebellious ... ungodly and sinful ... unholy and irreverent.” God **hates** slavery... just as God hates divorce. But He knows that man has a hard and sinful heart. ... So He regulates BOTH. ... [P A U S E] ...

What have we seen? ... #1. God does **not** support slavery... #2. my Brothers and Sisters in Christ who owned slaves were **not** Biblically

justified... (They were blinded by their cultural norms – just as we are sometimes blind and accept destructive sin!) ... #3. Paul had good reason for not denouncing slavery. (But let me say a little more to this before we move on.) ... Why didn't Paul outright condemn it?

An assault on slavery would have wrongly labeled Christianity as a “subversive movement.” Christians would (so unnecessarily) be seen as an even GREATER threat to the Empire. Why create another hindrance? ... (And then)... Can you imagine all the confusion it would have added to the propagation of the Gospel? ... Thousands of slaves would have joined the church – just to be free – not to follow Christ.

(Perhaps a less important reason would be)... Paul would have been calling for the immediate demise of the Roman economic system... which would bring immediate disaster by reducing church members (both slaves and masters) to absolute poverty. It would collapse the Roman-established economy.... all over the known world.

But look what Paul did instead. He addressed equality and called for an end of human mistreatment. And (did you know) even secular historians affirm that the Gospel eventually DID bring an end to slavery in the Roman Empire...? The GOSPEL eradicated slavery!

What is our best hope for social change(?)... even to correct a horrible evil like human bondage...? ... It isn't “denouncing human institutions or economic systems”... It is by PROPAGATING THE GOSPEL! Changing one life at a time in our culture with the message of Jesus Christ!

My friend... (by all means) do your civic duty as an American citizen. Vote and sign petitions for common decency causes... BUT place most of your effort where the greatest hope is - Getting the Gospel proclaimed!

Now we are ready for our second question that I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon. DOES SLAVERY EXIST TODAY?

Please don't think that slavery was abolished in America because of the Civil War. Human trafficking is a very big problem in America today. Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell have dominated the news for the last few years. They led a large-scale ring of human trafficking... making sex-slaves available to America's rich and powerful.

Human trafficking is the illegal trade of human beings. It's the recruitment... control... and use of people... for their bodies and for their labor. ... Through force... fraud... and coercion... people everywhere are being bought and sold against their will—right now in the 21st century. Slavery still exists... in the most despicable form imaginable!

Here are some of the statistics that I came across from a ministry called A21. (That stands for Acts chapter 21.) ... There are more people enslaved today... than any other time in history. ... There are an estimated 40 million people (world-wide) enslaved right now. ... Human trafficking generates 150 BILLION dollars year.

TODAY... In a few hours (down in Los Angeles) the Super Bowl will begin. In recent years a lot of attention has been called to the fact of how human trafficking for sex exploitation increases in the city where the Super Bowl is held. ... Now THIS year... the mainline media outlets (which I – personally – am dis-inclined to believe anymore)... are saying that is not true. ... But

A21 says that it is... as they bring forth many witnesses of former victims and law enforcement agents.

This is NOT the kind of slavery that our passage is about! There is NOT the slightest HINT of JUSTIFICATION for this despicable system. It is not an economic structure that our entire society is built upon. So please pray for its millions of victims. Today is a good day for you to do this. And if God leads you to be involved in other ways of solving this HUGE problem... please check out the web site of A21 where you will find a lot of suggestions.

So our passage today is not about this huge problem that our country currently faces. A LOT of other passages of Scripture do address this sin... but not our passage in 1st Timothy 6. ... So... **question #3**. is : DOES THIS PASSAGE HAVE ANY RELEVANCE FOR YOU AND I?

The answer is yes... and let me begin to show it to you... by starting with the immediate situation Paul was addressing in the church at Ephesus.

There was a high slave-to-master ratio in the Ephesian church... which was a natural formula for tension. ... Many Christian slaves came from homes with non-Christian masters. ... Others had Christian masters... who would naturally be in the same house church.... A number of possibilities could arise whereby the slave comes to resent his owner. The slave may be disappointed that his brother in the Lord hasn't released him and forgiven his debt. It is not outside the realm of possibility as well that in the local assembly the slave is an elder and the master is "just" a layperson. Subsequently those positions of authority are reversed during the week... and the slave may come to believe this arrangement is no longer

acceptable. He may reason in his mind, “*Are we not all equal in Christ (according to Gal. 3:28)?*”

But even more important... misconduct in the church would not only hurt the church... but would harm its reputation with those outside... and limit the spread of the gospel. ... Looking at Paul’s instructions... it is easy for us to assume what was happening.

Apparently certain Christian slaves were going home from church and taking with them some rather radical ideas about equality. ... They began to treat their masters with disrespect. ... Non-Christian masters found that formerly profitable slaves had become brooding... disrespectful... and unprofitable. ... So their pagan masters blasphemed both the name of God and Paul’s teaching of the gospel—

“These Christians are a waste. Lazy, otherworldly, and in their pious way disrespectful. Theirs is no longer the fearful obedience and respect that all the other slaves show. Some teaching in that gospel! It takes a good slave and makes him worthless.”

The insubordinate behavior of slaves posed a definite threat to the church’s reputation. ... So Paul issued corrective instructions. You have not been released from any of your human obligations. In fact... you are even more obligated (now)... to be a model of respect and obedience. Serve your earthly master... as if it was Jesus. ... [P A U S E] ...

There is so much relevance for you and I in this! ... (LISTEN!) ...

Respect for authority - even in situations where you want to cry (“UNFAIR! – UNJUST!”) - continues to be a **NECESSARY** part of Christian witness. ... People are always clamoring for their “rights” - but the Bible stresses your Christian witness! ... [P A U S E] ...

(LISTEN!)... we all are subservient to someone! ... The attitudes and integrity commanded in this passage are just as much for you and I... because servitude is at the heart of the Christian calling.

Marriage is servitude. Being a husband is servanthood. A Christian man who commits to love his wife “*as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*” (Ephesians 5:25) commits his whole being to servitude. He is never MORE right with God... as when he serves his wife. ... Being a wife is servanthood also. ... By loving the imperfect man that she is married to... she is never MORE Christ-like!

Family life is servitude. ... Parenting is servitude. It means giving all you have in order to see your children grow into spiritual maturity. ... It is giving... and giving... and giving — just like God our Father. .../ Growing up is servitude — obeying one’s parents and lovingly trying to please them.

The workplace is servitude... Being an employee is servanthood — giving the best hours of your day to an educational or corporate enterprise or government or business. ... Being an employer (when rightly understood)... is servitude too. You serve those under you with a heart for their success.

Listen to Jesus: “*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you*” (John 13:14, 15). “*Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve*” (Mark 10:43–45). ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Our final question today is this: “Will you serve others – as if they are Jesus?” ... Don’t clamor for your rights! Clamor for your witness!