
Sermon Notes

June 13, 2021

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

Servitude or Service?

1 Timothy 6:1-2

A Difficult Concept

- ❖ **Bondservants** is more literally and more precisely translated by the word: slaves
 - we must deal openly and honestly with the way texts such as this one have been misunderstood and misapplied over the course of church history
 - sadly, the church has stood silently by in many eras as people were enslaved, abused, stripped of dignity and horribly mistreated
 - over the centuries, devoted believers have appealed to OT laws concerning the way slaves are to be treated and the process through which slaves could obtain freedom
- ❖ The differences between the way slavery was practiced in the ancient world and the way it was practiced in more recent times
 - not based on race or ethnicity
 - an economic necessity
 - many slaves became family members with significant responsibilities (business, government, education, medicine, etc...)
 - not necessarily permanent

- ❖ Estimates suggest there were between fifty and sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire
 - as many as one third of the populations of large cities such as Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus were slaves
 - the culture of slavery affected virtually every aspect of the Roman world
- ❖ Christianity eventually became the single greatest force in history for the eradication of slavery
 - Paul speaks out clearly against those who are *enslavers* in 1 Timothy 1:9-10
 - “man-stealing” is listed as a capital crime in Exodus 21:16 and Deuteronomy 24:17
 - though Paul does not speak out against the institution of slavery, he does speak clearly against those who force others into servitude against their will

Paul's Point

- ❖ Who is Paul addressing in this text?
 - slave holders or slaves?
 - those who are under *a yoke of slavery*
 - a yoke suggests a burden
 - being put into a harness to work
- ❖ Paul gives a word of direction and encouragement for slaves who serve non-Christian masters as well as a word of exhortation and admonition for slaves who serve Christian masters

- ❖ Paul is not intent on dismantling the slave system or inciting a slave rebellion
 - Paul commends slaves to live godly lives in the midst of an unjust system
 - Paul addresses the attitudes of those who function within the social structure of slavery
 - even if masters are unjust, treatment is cruel, conditions are subhuman, *treat your masters as worthy of all honor*
 - why? *so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled*
 - as is the case in all forms of suffering, God does not counsel His people to avoid suffering at any cost
 - God gives us the grace we need to endure suffering for the sake of Christ
- ❖ We can carry over these patterns and precepts to the economic relationship that exists between employers and employees
 - how should employees respond to unfair demands?
 - honor their employers and give them the respect their position deserves even if their conduct is lacking
 - respect is something every Christian worker owes to every boss, even in the worst of working environments
- ❖ Paul's use of the word *regard*
 - employers who are not actually worthy of respect
 - *regard* them *as worthy of all honor*

- ❖ If Christians are poor workers, God and His gospel are brought into disrepute
 - **two things** are at stake every time a believer punches the time clock
 - God's name and the gospel of Jesus Christ
- ❖ Employees who work for Christian employers
 - don't take advantage and don't take for granted
 - don't undervalue the authority of Christian employers by treating them as equals on the job
- ❖ The distinguishing mark of Christian relationships is love
 - employers don't look down on employees
 - employees strive to give their employers the very best of which they are capable
- ❖ God is your ultimate Master (Ephesians 6:5-8)
- ❖ Christ has become your servant (Philippians 2:7)

Personal Application

1. If you are an employer, what new insights do these verses give you on how you are to manage your employees?
2. If you are an employee, what new insights do these verses give you about your attitude toward your employer and the way you do your job?
3. Read Ephesians 6:5-8 and Philippians 2:7. God is both your Master AND your servant. How does that realization effect the way you serve God in the marketplace?