

THE UNITED WAY

*Christ calls believing workers & employers—for the glory of his gospel—
together to seek (mutual submission) the kingdom of God and its blessings!*

Cov Pres

EPHESIANS 6:5-9

3 June A.D. 2012

ONE: Don't read our text apart from Christ Jesus and his atoning cross & bodily resurrection.

William Stringfellow, at The National Conference on Religion & Race, Chicago, 1963; Martin Luther King also spoke, at this first major ecumenical, interfaith (Christians & Jews) conference to address racial conflict: It is the corruption and shallowness of humanism which beguiles Jew or Christian into believing that human beings are masters of institution or ideology. Or to put it differently, racism is not an evil in human hearts or minds, racism is a principality, a demonic power, a representative image, an embodiment of death, over which human beings have little or no control, but which works its awful influence in their lives.... This [racism] is the power with which Jesus Christ was confronted and which, at great and sufficient cost, he overcame. In other words, the issue here is not equality among human beings. The issue is not some common spiritual values, nor natural law, nor middle axioms. The issue is baptism. The issue is the unity of all humankind wrought by God in the life and work of Christ. Baptism is the sacrament of that unity of all humanity in God.

The context for Paul's instruction to slaves/bondservants and masters:

- 1:22-23** Christ is head over all things to the church, which is his body, into which he chooses and adopts us for his glory... *(completing the thought of chapter 1)*
- 2:21-22** He made us his creation in Christ Jesus, one new man out of two, a dwelling of God in the Spirit... *(completing the thought of chapter 2)*
- 3:19-4:7** Knowing the love of God in Christ, for his glory in the church, we walk worthy as one body, each using our gifts to build up the body...
- 4:30-5:2** Not grieving the Spirit we put away wrath and anger, imitating God as beloved children, by the Spirit, offering ourselves up in mutual submission as God did in Christ...

[The structure below lays out the relation of clauses/phrases by indentation (& by larger font in 5a, 7a, 9a & 9b)]

3:5 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 eye-service,

as men-pleasers

but as slaves of Christ

7 With good will render service,

as to the Lord

and not to men,

8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does,

this he will receive back from the Lord

whether slave or free.

9 And masters,

Do the same things to them

and give up threatening

knowing that both *their* Master and *yours* is in heaven

and there is no partiality with Him. ^{NAS}

We preach not a political moralism—powerless to end slavery and sin—but rather redemption in Christ Jesus.

TWO: Work—regardless of role—is redeemed by Christ our Master

Our brokenness is revealed in the distortions of work & wealth, bondage & blessing (**a theology of work**).

Roman society's slavery and the British/American kind are both the fruit of sin.

(1) Christ as King, (2) Paul's call for mutual submission & (3) our union with Christ undermine all slavery.

Believers live before God as their Father—and no one can hide from his face (omnipresent eyes!)

Paul's instructions are for believers whose life in the Spirit makes them each a bondservant of Christ.

THREE: Slaves & masters (workers & employers, wives & husbands, children & parents)—all who are the church—render service (6:7, 9) as unto Christ, so His coming kingdom shines now.

PRINCIPLE: kingdom reality—all-seeing, impartial Master of all...

Job 31:13–15 ^{NAS}

13 "If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves When they filed a complaint against me,
14 What then could I do when God arises? And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him?
15 "Did not He who made me in the womb make him, And the same one fashion us in the womb?

6:9 *Give up threatening*: our need to pay special attention to the weak whom we easily threaten and intimidate (pray for minority populations and immigrants in all countries and cultures).

PRACTICAL: serving one another—according to role—with justice and fairness...

Student: *You gave me a B!* Teacher: *You earned a B!* OR: Teacher: *You earned a C; I gave you a B!*

Worker (rights-focused): *This is **my** job!*

Worker (responsibilities focused): *This is **your** job and I will do it (as unto Christ Jesus) the best that I can.*

Employee (rights-focused): *I want everything in my contract with perpetual increases.* **vs.** *E/E: We promise hard work & openness to change to do together what's needed to make this business grow...*

Employer (responsibility-focused): *Accounting for all our responsibilities, I promise respect, justness, and fairness as together we seek to increase the company's value to our mutual benefit* [cf., R.C. Sproul's *Stronger than Steel*, 1980, (the story of Wayne Alderson & Pittron Steel)].

PERSONAL: getting rid of my and my culture's junk and distortions, so I can render service to any and all in the manner of Christ...

Luther (*interpreted*): *Serve Christ: start a business; treat believers & unbelievers both in gospel ways!*

Who sits where at the Lord's Table?

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

Colossians: 3 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.

Ephesians 6:8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, **this he will receive back from the Lord**, whether slave or free.