

MBC - 2/7/2010 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"For Those Under the Yoke"
1 Timothy 6:1,2

- 1Ti 6:1 Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and *our* doctrine may not be spoken against.
- 1Ti 6:2 And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these *principles*.

I hope we don't take a passage like this lightly. It might sound as though it has no application to you and me this morning, but contained in these verses is the formula for the greatest revolution that the world has ever seen.

I mean that when Christians submit to the Lord Jesus Christ by living godly, submissive lives under the worst conditions, the world is turned upside down. Kingdoms crumble, and tyrants are de-throned - I believe it's Christianity that ultimately caused the Roman Empire to collapse, and a large part of that was the way Christians continued to love Christ and love their enemies even when they were being persecuted, tortured, and killed.

Look at v.1 again: when Christians are humble and submissive under whatever yoke they are under, the name of God and our doctrine - which means, the Gospel - aren't spoken against, instead, God uses the witness of His people to draw unbelievers to Christ. The hearts of wicked, godless bosses can be turned; the hearts of wicked, godless husbands can be turned - and we've seen that happen, haven't we?

But here is the point I want you to leave with this morning: one of the strongest witnesses for Christ we can have is our Christlike submission to ungodly authority. I want us to just read a passage that is really the commentary on our passage here in 1 Tim. And it speaks for itself:

- 1Pe 2:12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. [And look at the very first way he says we can do this:]
- 1Pe 2:13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,
- 1Pe 2:14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. [And add here: the boss you work for, wives - your husbands; children - your parents]
- 1Pe 2:15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.
- 1Pe 2:16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.
- 1Pe 2:17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.
- 1Pe 2:18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.
- 1Pe 2:19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.
- 1Pe 2:20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.
- 1Pe 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.
- 1Pe 2:22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

- 1Pe 2:23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Beloved, if Jesus had not submitted to ungodly authority, He wouldn't have been crucified; we wouldn't have a Savior! And when that centurion watched the way Jesus died, in humble submission to His Father, what did he say? "Truly this was the Son of God!" And when people watch His followers bear up graciously under hardship and ungodly authority, they will say, "And truly these people are His followers!"

Where has God called you to suffer like Christ this morning? Are you following in His steps?

I want you to keep in mind everything I've just said, because it will help us answer a question that we began looking at last time:

I. Why doesn't the Bible condemn slavery?

John Stott wrote this:

Slavery has been described as a 'monster abomination.' Not that there is anything de-meaning about service, when it is given voluntarily. On the contrary, Jesus Himself demonstrated its dignity by washing His disciples' feet. He called Himself both servant and slave, and added that each of His followers must be the slave of all. What is degrad-ing and fundamentally destructive of a person's humanness, is when one human being is forcibly owned by another and is thus robbed of all freedom. Slaves have three defining characteristics. Their person is another's property, so that they may be bought and sold; their will is subject to another's authority; and their labor is obtained by another's coercion.

And if you think slavery is a thing of the past, it's very much with us today. It's come to the surface with the spotlight on Haiti. Listen to this from a book called *Slavery in Haiti, a Crime so Monstrous*, by Benjamin Skinner:

Slaves are everywhere. Assuming that this is your first trip to Haiti, you won't be able to identify them. But to a lower-middle-class Haitian, their status is 'written in blood.' Some are as young as three or four years old. But they'll always be the small ones, even if they're older. The average fifteen-year-old child slave is 1.5 inches shorter and 40 pounds lighter than the average free fifteen-year-old. They may have burns from cooking for their overseer's family over an open fire; or scars from beatings, sometimes in public, with the martinet, electrical cables, or wood switches. They wear faded, out-sized castoffs, and walk barefoot, in sandals or, if they are lucky, oversized shoes...

[Y]ou may see their tiny necks and delicate skulls straining as they tote five-gallon buckets of water on their heads while navigating broken glass and shattered roads.

These are the *restavéks*, the 'stay-withs,' (child slaves) as they are euphemistically known in Creole. Forced, unpaid, they work from before dawn until deep night. The violence in their lives is unyielding. These are the children who won't look into your eyes. Nationwide the number of *restavéks* is roughly half a million, or one in ten Haitian children.

So if slavery is so awful, then why do we come to 1 Timothy 6 and find instructions for Christian slaves? In some of his other letters, Paul even gives instructions for slave-masters. Why didn't Paul just say, "I hereby abolish the whole system!"?

The fact is, the Bible never commands or even endorses slavery, but it doesn't come out and call it sin either. Why is that? And how do we answer unbelievers who criticize the Bible for supposedly supporting slavery, and Christians for owning slaves and using the Bible as their justification?

Let me review what we looked at 4 weeks ago: I said that the first response probably needs to be, "guilty as charged!" We should admit with shame the spiritual blindness of some of our spiritual or physical ancestors, because there is no excuse for Christians supporting the forced servitude of others. And here is why:

A.) The Scriptures condemn manstealing.

1 Tim.1:10 mentions the "enslaver" and groups this sin with murder and homosexuality. In Exodus, the penalty for man-stealing was death. Slavery in this country came about from the forced enslavement of over 15 million people who were brought here from Africa from the 17th through the 19th centuries.

- In Rev 18:11-13 the evil merchants of the earth weep and mourn over the downfall of Babylon because there is no one left to buy their cargo of "gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth . . . and slaves, that is, human souls."
- Some Christians said that the slave trade was wrong, but not *owning* slaves who were here as a result of this evil. I told you that Jonathan Edwards Jr. rebuked his own father for this twisted logic. The fact is, *slaveholding* is the highest possible violation of the 8th commandment, "you shall not steal," because you are stealing a person's freedom.

B.) Racism is sin.

And slavery in this country was uniformly racist. It was rooted in a false theory that the Genesis curse on Canaan, meant that black people were cursed and condemned to be slaves. That is totally false. Some Christians even concocted a theory to include the native-Americans in this group so that they could be enslaved and mistreated as well! Amazing.

But some Christians rationalized that these poor savages were going to better off here, so we were doing them a favor:

- "The great Architect [God] had framed them both physically and mentally to fill the sphere in which they were thrown, and His wisdom and mercy combined in constituting them thus suited to the degraded position they were destined to occupy. Hence, their submissiveness, their obedience, their contentment."
- A historian recorded a Rhode Island church elder rejoicing when a slave ship coasted in to the wharf, that "an overruling Providence has been pleased to bring to this land of freedom another cargo of benighted heathens to enjoy the blessings of a Gospel dispensation."

That is twisted! The Great Commission is go and make disciples, not go and kidnap people and then witness to them! Slavery in this country was evil because it was racist. Blacks were regarded as an inferior - sometimes even sub-human - race. I did a little research into slavery in my home state of Indiana:

- Indiana public schools in 1850, declared that in the eyes of the state, "black children were deemed unfit associates of whites, as school companions."
- During the constitutional debate in the state that same year, one speaker said this about slaves who had acquired their freedom, "It would be better to kill them off at once, if there is no other way to get rid of them. ... We know how the Puritans did with the Indians, who were infinitely more magnanimous and less impudent than the colored race."

To regard any race as inferior is evil because it denies the image of God in man. And I believe that it's satanic as well. I learned recently that the full title of Darwin's famous evolutionary book is: "*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life.*"

And you know that Hitler appealed to Darwin's theory to justify slaughtering millions of Jews and other races he regarded as inferior. So did Karl Marx, the father of Communism, who dedicated "*Das Kapital*" to Darwin.

But let me give you the most basic, obvious reason that slavery in this country was wrong:

C.) It violates the law of love.

"Love your neighbor as yourself," and the Golden Rule, "to do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It doesn't matter how kind slaveowners might have been, they were violating these commandments by owning human beings and depriving them of their freedom. None of those slaveowners would have wanted to be the property of another - but of course, they didn't even think like this, because they believed that they were a superior race.

You know that old John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace used to be a slave ship captain, but did you know that he was once a slave himself?

Before God saved him, he was such a pain, that his ship left him in West Africa where he became the slave of an African princess, and he was abused and mistreated along with the rest of her slaves. He never forgot what it was like to be the slave of someone else. On his tombstone it says: "*once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in West Africa.*"

No wonder Newton was so passionately *against* slavery - he knew what it was like! He knew that it violated the law of love: No slave owner could look his slave in the eye and say, "I am treating you the way I want to be treated."

- But let me say this: I'm slow to judge the hearts of some of these people - I'm thinking of Christian people who owned slaves, and treated them like family, and evangelized them - like Jonathan Edwards did. If I had lived in their time and culture, I might have had the same blindspot. And I'm sure that I have my own spiritual blindspots right now! 200 years from now, Christians will probably look back and say, "Man, what were those Christians in 2010 thinking? Didn't they read their Bibles? And have you heard those old sermons from that Doug Thompson guy? What a nutjob he was!"

But this still doesn't answer the question: How can we say that slavery was wrong, when the Bible doesn't condemn it? Let me tell you what I believe is—

II. The solution: The Gospel planted the seeds for the end of slavery.

I.e., as Christians lived out the Gospel, and submitted to ungodly authority, and returned good for evil, and prayed for those who mistreated them, they would silence the ignorance of foolish men, and eventually slavery would pass away.

Just think: what would have happened if Jesus or Paul pronounced the immediate end of slavery? It would have been social and economic chaos! There were something like 50 million slaves in the Roman Empire during this time - they were basically the middle class of that society. Imagine if the Christian slaves said, "We're outta here, Paul said so!" That would have been their death sentence - and the law in that day was that if one slave in a household rebelled, all the slaves could be executed. And even if they weren't killed, they would be out of work and on the streets.

And what kind of a witness would it have been to unbelievers? "Christianity means rebellion and chaos."

Jesus came to bring about His kingdom by the slow process of changing men's hearts, not by the violent overthrow of social structures. So Jesus and Paul dealt with life as it is in this fallen world, good and bad, to show that the transforming power of the Gospel is not bound by culture or politics or social structures.

We see that in 1 Cor.7 (turn there), the Corinthians were wondering if they could be Christians if they were married to unbelievers, or if they were slaves. And Paul tells them "You can be a Christian in any situation. As a matter of fact, be slow to change your circumstances, because God wants the world to see how Christians can live out their faith in the most unpleasant and ungodly situations, like slavery. He wants to show how the Gospel triumphs over the harshest realities of life:

- 1Co 7:17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.
- 1Co 7:18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised (Jewish)? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised (Gentile)? Let him not seek circumcision.
- 1Co 7:19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.
- 1Co 7:20 Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.
- 1Co 7:21 Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) [not by running away, but by purchasing it.]
- 1Co 7:22 For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ.
- 1Co 7:23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.
- 1Co 7:24 So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Three times he says it, "The general rule is, stay where you are and be the best Christian you can be, right there - bloom where you are planted, and show the world how powerful the Gospel is!" And don't think that your circumstances or the govt. you live under or the boss you work for has to change before you can do that. In fact, *the worse your circumstances, the more your light can shine, right?*

- I saw this 25 years ago when I made a trip to Romania to teach Pastors in that Communist country. Almost every pastor I met had a story of persecution, torture, and being thrown into jail under the godless, atheistic Communist govt. So I asked one of these pastors, "So how do the Christians here deal with living under Communism? Do they

pray about overthrowing the govt.? . . .” I thought it was an intelligent question, but he just gave me a puzzled look and said: “God has called us to live like Christ under a godless Communist govt.”

Live out Christ even under Communism! That doesn’t mean that God approves of Communism, does it? The Gospel can survive Communism, but communism can’t survive the Gospel! And neither can slavery survive the Gospel. When God’s Word is *lived out*, slavery has to *die out*. Look with me at Col.3, to see what I mean:

- Col 3:22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.
- Col 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men;
- Col 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. [Get that: Your true Master is Jesus Christ. And He makes you this promise:]
- Col 3:25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

And then Paul speaks to Christian slave owners:

- Col 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

“ . . . and How does He treat you? And aren’t you supposed to treat your brothers and sisters the way Jesus treats you? And how can you do that when you are free but have others enslaved - is that just and fair? Then how could you own another Christian?”

- ESV fnt: “Paul does not condone the system of slavery but instead provides instructions to believing masters and slaves regarding their relationship to each other in the Lord. *Such instruction clearly sows the seeds for the eventual dismantling of this unjust socioeconomic structure.*”

Do you see that? Not from the outside in, but from the inside out, as hearts change.

If you went through the Bible study on Philemon I gave you a few weeks ago, you saw the same thing: Paul didn’t say, “If you don’t set Onesimus free, you are in sin!” Instead, he went for his heart! He called Onesimus his own child, he said that he was sending him back, “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.” Paul told Philemon to receive back his runaway slave, “as you would receive me.” And oh, uh, by the way, he says in v.22, “I’m hoping that through your prayers, I will be set free from my own imprisonment so that I can see you again . . . yep, freedom is a good thing - for everyone - even Onesimus.”

And then he says, “confident of your obedience, I write you, knowing that you will do even more than I say!”

- ESV intro: . . . There is no doubt that it would have been difficult for the institution of slavery to survive in the atmosphere of love created by the letter, and in fact the elements of Paul’s appeal found in this letter helped lay the foundation for the abolition of slavery.
- Archaeologists have found an ancient inscription near Colosse, from a slave who was freed by his master, whose name was Marcus Sestius Philemon. (John Robbins)

III. The principle applied to us.

So now, let's look at vv.1,2 where Paul has to deal with the reality of a society where 1/3 of the population are slaves, and both slaves and masters are hearing the gospel and getting saved, so now what? He says, "Be the best Christian you can be in whatever situation you are in!" And this applies to every one of us. Let's look at it:

- 1Ti 6:1 Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and *our* doctrine may not be spoken against.
- 1Ti 6:2 And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved.

In v.1, Paul is saying, "If you have an unsaved master, don't blow your Christian testimony by being disrespectful, and if you have a Christian master, don't blow it by taking advantage of him." And look what is at stake in v.1: "*so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against.*"

The world is watching Christians! - at their jobs; in their marriages and in their homes; kids: the world is watching you like a hawk at school; the world is watching you when you are out shopping, driving, eating - you never know when they are watching you, and two things are at stake in what they see in you and me: the reputation of God's name, and "our doctrine," or teaching, which in Paul, refers to the Gospel.

Don't do anything that causes people to think less of the God you say you love and serve, or to get the wrong idea about the Gospel you claim has saved you and changed you. He turns it around in Tit.2:9,10, and says, "let your life give credibility to God and the Gospel:"

- Tit 2:9 Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative,
- Tit 2:10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may *adorn* the doctrine of God our Savior.

How many of you have ever worked with someone who claimed to be Christians, but on the job he or she was lazy, or disrespectful, or used foul language, or complained all the time? And then another co-worker you were trying to witness to says, "Well so-and-so claims to be a Christian, and they're a real jerk. Why would I want to be like them?"

But you've worked with other Christians who draw people to Christ by their words, their attitudes, and the way they do their work. Maybe that's what God used to draw you to Christ. I hope that's the kind of person you.

So when the world watches you at work, at home, in your marriage, when you are out - what are they seeing? How does it reflect on the name of God, and the Gospel?

I want you to leave here this morning, asking yourself these questions. I want you to see that you and I have a constant opportunity to be a witness and a light for Christ.

And I want you to see that the tougher your circumstances at work, in your marriage, at school, wherever you are, the brighter your light can shine.

Jesus said this to His followers living under a godless govt.:

- Mat 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.
- Mat 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
- Mat 5:15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.
- Mat 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Apply this to your work situation your light can shine the brightest when things around you are the darkest! When the people around you are taking God's name in vain, you can tell them how thankful you are to Him. And when the people around you are griping and complaining and doing as little as they can get away with, you can show them that you are serving Christ in your work, and you are content in Him.

Upside-down:

Do you remember last Sunday when we talked about how we can be more than conquerors in Christ through the darkest, most painful times? God delights in turning things upside down, have you noticed that? And He does it to show off His glory and His power.

I want you to think about how He does that here: You take a Christian slave who might be treated like an animal by his cruel unbelieving master - absolutely no dignity or respect. But by the heart-transforming power of the Gospel, that slave can treat his master as though he were worthy of all honor - and show the world something supernatural.

- ? - If someone is mistreating you, they are cruel to you, disrespectful to you, and yet return evil with a blessing and pray for those who persecute you - who is really the slave, and who is really free?

Beloved, we occupy the high ground here: We have been shown mercy and grace, we have the Holy Spirit and the life of Christ in us, and we are on our way to heaven. We can do this. You can do this the next time you go to work, or home to that unsaved husband or whatever yoke you are under.

- Rom 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Online copy of Rev. Theodore Weld's book, *The Bible Against Slavery* (1837)
<http://medicolegal.tripod.com/weldbas.htm#tableofcontents>

Theology of Slavery: Western Theology's Role in the Development and Propagation of Slavery
Author: Scott Foutz <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/foutz-slavery.shtml>