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2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Oct 26th – Nov 1st

Sermon: October 25th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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October 26

Jeremiah 34:8-17

I think it is important that we begin this week by putting to rest an accusation that I have heard levied against the Bible at times. Folks who are looking for reasons not to believe, or better, not to live under the authority of God's Word, claim that the Bible is okay with and doesn't condemn slavery. This, in their minds, gives them reason to disregard it and to ignore the clear teaching of God's Word in so many areas of life.

First of all, it is necessary to understand what "slavery" was during the time periods in which the Bible was written. Exodus 21:16 says, "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death." There was no room in God's ethic for the slave trade as most of us think about it from our own understanding of the awful atrocities that took place in our nation as well as many others throughout the world. By the way, you don't have to wait until the 17th -20th centuries to find that the sinful nature of man had led to horrible and egregiously sinful actions concerning slavery.

Even in the Bible, the depravity of man took what God intended as a temporary measure for those unable to provide for themselves and their families, and as a voluntary means of providing for one's family, to unbiblical and godless places. This is precisely why the "rules and regulations" were added to the Bible. Like the reasons God provided guidelines for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, He did in regard to slavery as well. The verses governing this reality were not meant to support slavery but to regulate it so that the innocent would be treated properly and in a Christlike manner.

Slavery or being a bondservant was created as a means for a person who could not make ends meet to be able to do so in service to another. This entire "institution" was meant to be no more than a six-year agreement with the "slave" being set free at the seventh year (Ex. 21:1-2). This was also understood to be a voluntary action on behalf of the poor person who had no other means to provide.

In the passage that I chose for today, Jeremiah 34:8-17, God is angry with the people because they have not been treating the slaves properly. In response to the reminder to obey God's Word in the proper treatment of those who are slaves, it says that the people repented for a while and then went right back to their sinful ways (vv. 16-17). His punishment against them because of this particular sin was extremely severe. My hope is that you will see God's heart concerning slavery and realize that what we know and understand about that horrible and sinful reality in our own world, was completely appalling to God. All who would commit such sins today will be judged by God as well.

I will address this again tomorrow but keep in mind that our passage from Sunday is meant to encourage those who are Christians and are living as slaves or bondservants. God desires that they conduct themselves in a way that pleases Him and demonstrates their faith in Him. He expects the "masters" to do the same.

October 27

Psalm 81:12; Acts 14:16

Sometimes people draw wrong conclusions about the heart and nature of God simply because they don't know Him or how He operates. For example, people look around the world today and assume God is okay with all this chaos and evil. Surely, they surmise if He wasn't then He would put a stop to it or at least punish the "bad" guys severely. I have chosen a couple of passages today that show us there are times in our lives when God allows us to do whatever we want.

Now, you may think that sounds like a pretty good deal. The problem with that conclusion is that you fail to understand the depravity of the human heart. If you think that when we are left to ourselves we are going to choose to be good people the majority of the time, you are sadly mistaken and completely blind and foolish. Every time that you read in the Bible that God turned people over to themselves, it is a time of judgment and punishment. For example, in Psalm 81:12 it is written, "So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels." This is a result of the previous verse that says, "But My people did not listen to My voice; Israel would not submit to Me" (v.11). So, after repeated opportunities and extended patience, God says, "Fine. Do your own thing and see how that ends up." Friend, that is not the place you want to be or the place a nation wants to be.

You find Luke writing a similar sentiment in Acts 14:16. He writes, "In past generations He allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways." We cannot assume that what God permits or allows for a time, is pleasing to Him and certainly not in accordance with His Word, will, and ways. God allows humans to sin but remains in control of all things as He, in His power, wisdom, and omnipresence, works all things for His glory and the good of His people.

You must factor these truths in when you consider passages in which God is governing slavery but not appearing to condemn it...YET! God permits all kinds of sinful behaviors in our world today. Think about the horrible realities of pornography, prostitution, sex-trafficking, gambling, crooked and perverse politicians, and so on. I suppose we all wonder at times why God doesn't just put a stop to all this evil right now. This is where we must learn to trust His goodness and His wisdom and believe with all our hearts that He is working out a beautiful plan that includes sinful humanity for now.

October 28

Genesis 20:6; Matthew 6:13

I wrote yesterday about the horrible times when God takes His hands off a people, removes the hedges of protection from around them, or removes any restraining means from sin in their lives. He does this because of repeated and continual rebellion and rejection of His Word. Today, I want you to get a glimpse of what it looks like, at times, when God continues to keep His hand upon us, and our need to pray that He does so.

Here is a good example of how God can step in and keep us from sinning, thus demonstrating His sovereignty as well as His ability to “guide our steps” in the way we should go. You may recall the story recorded in the twentieth chapter of the book of Genesis. There, Abraham and Sarah entered a city called Gerar. Abraham concocted the plan to tell king Abimelech that she is his sister so that they will not kill Abraham and take her. Yes, I think we all agree that was a lame and selfish plan.

Abimelech did not kill Abraham when he saw the beautiful woman with him, but he did take Sarah into his harem all the same. One would certainly assume that he took her for his own sexual pleasure. Here is where God stepped in. The Bible tells us that God came to the king in a dream and told him that Sarah was Abraham’s wife and that if he touched her, he would be killed (v.3). Abimelech pleads with God that he did not know that she was another man’s wife and so God does not harm him as Abimelech quickly returns her to Abraham.

In Genesis 20:6 it is written, “...and it was I who kept you from sinning against Me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her.” Isn’t that wonderful that in this man’s ignorance, God protected him from further sin and harm? Friend, this is where you want to live. As long as the Lord is interested enough in you to keep you from all sorts of harm, you are in a good place. This does not mean that He will never allow you to commit any sin because then you really would be nothing but a puppet on a string and obedience would mean nothing. Just as a side note, we must always remember that God has much bigger plans than our comfort and ease. He moved in this way in this circumstance because He had sovereignly chosen Abraham and Sarah to play a major role in the establishment of His people.

Ponder today the example that Jesus provided to His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray. What we now refer to as “The Lord’s Prayer,” contains this verse: “...and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). Jesus teaches us that we should be mindful of the need to stay steadfast and vigilant in our battle against sin and falling. To help us in this effort, we should ask God Himself to keep us from places where we are more likely to fall into sin or to be tempted to do so. I think we would all agree that God “delivered” Abimelech from evil, and we should believe He will do the same for us...if we ask. Yes, God will turn us over to our own reprobate minds, but He will also help us fight the battle against sin when we remain humble and yielded in obedience to Him.

October 29

1 Peter 2:12-15, 18-23

Today, we want to begin to examine why the admonition from the Lord to those in difficult and very challenging circumstances exist. Paul wrote to Titus and told him to tell those who are enduring the hardships of being a bondservant to be submissive and Christlike in how they serve and relate to their masters (Titus 2:9-10). He tells us why he encourages them towards this behavior in this passage as well. Verse 10 contains these words, "...so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." This is an interesting passage to say the least.

You could imagine a person serving as a bondservant being trifling, inefficient, obstinate, and difficult. In many cases we would all probably think their behavior justifiable. Keep in mind however that these people were to be serving either to pay off debt or simply to earn shelter, food, and clothing for their family. Paul, through Titus, tells them that they should serve in a manner that reflects their salvation and relationship with the Lord. Remember that we are told in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that we should do everything "as unto the Lord." This is a call to live in a God-honoring way regardless of our circumstances.

This is like what Peter wrote in his first epistle. In 1 Peter 2:12, the believers are encouraged to conduct themselves in a godly manner so that the lost will see Christ in them and hopefully come to faith in God as well. In verse 13, he says to be subject to every human institution "for the Lord's sake." Again, because of our Christlike behavior and demeanor, many of the criticisms and accusations by those who despise our faith are put to silence (v.15). He does not leave us without an example to emulate in this letter.

Beginning in 1 Peter 2:18, we are told that servants should submit to their masters with respect regardless of the treatment they are receiving. I know that sounds crazy and impossible, but it is not in the power of our Savior. It is He whom Peter refers to as our ultimate example of such godly behavior in the face of the worst of treatment (v 21). Look to Christ and remember that He endured horrible treatment as "One who committed no sin nor ever spoke sinful words. Peter tells us that when He was reviled, He did not revile in return, nor did He threaten them when He suffered at their hands.

His answer to His harsh circumstances needs to be ours as well. The Bible says that "He continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly." This means that Jesus Christ trusted God the Father in His circumstances to handle and deal with His enemies in His own time and in His own way. Surely, this is hard for us to do but we are called to it, nonetheless. The Holy Spirit will help us in our weaknesses and give us the strength and the proper mindset to behave in a way that people see Jesus, His beauty, and His value in us. Living right in the face of hard things is the equivalent of adorning the doctrine of God. More on that tomorrow.

October 30

1 Peter 3:3-4

Today we will spend a little more time in the book of 1st Peter. Peter encourages the women to think about how they conduct themselves and refers to it as “adorning” themselves. The idea behind this phrase is similar to that of putting on makeup, jewelry, and fixing your hair up all nice and pretty. Peter certainly does not imply that these habits don’t matter, but he is saying in this context that there is something more precious to God than getting all dolled up. The focus is of course the heart.

Peter writes, “Do not let your adorning be external...but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Pet. 3:3-4). Notice that God calls a beautiful, Christlike heart precious in His sight. There is a beauty that moves God, but it is not simply a pretty face; it is a gentle heart and sweet spirit. God wants us to live and walk in a manner that is worthy of being called His children (Ephesians 4:1). Our lives should match the high honor of being chosen by God.

The first three chapters of the book of Ephesians focus on who you are in Christ. The final three chapters focus on how you should live in view of who you are as a child of God. This passage for our sermon on Sunday falls into this category as well. Yes, the circumstances that the bondservant may find himself in are difficult, but the admonition is that he/she be adorned with Christlike behavior so that others will see the doctrines of God lived out in real space and time. This walk would include humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, and other Spirit produced fruit.

Titus 2:9-10 says that as we live by faith in the promises of God, we adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. This is our opportunity to put Jesus on display for the world to see. To adorn is to put on. We are putting on Christ in such a way that we become the fragrance or aroma of Christ when we walk into a room (2 Cor. 2:15; Eph. 5:2). To adorn the doctrine of God is to put on display the strength He provides when we are weak. It is to face brokenness, disappointment, and even tragedy with faith that God is in control and that heaven, and His provisions are real for this life and the next. It is to live so that people know we believe there is a Creator who gives purpose to our circumstances by His providence and sovereignty. It is to show others that there truly is a God who holds us when the bottom falls out and who balances us when we experience incredible highs and victories.

You see, for the bondservant, it may feel like he has every reason to sulk, to complain, to have a poor attitude and work ethic, and to be disrespectful to the ones who are over him. For us today, it would be the equivalent of performing and behaving poorly for a “bad” boss. Jesus says don’t do that! On the contrary, we should conduct ourselves above board and as the best employee on the floor or slave in the field. Do it because it puts on display or adorns the reality of God and who He really is. It is the reality of being an image bearer!

October 31

Job 12:7-10; John 13:7

The Heidelberg Catechism written in the 1500's contains these words: "The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures...yea, and all things come, **not by chance**, but by His fatherly hand; that we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father." That is a wonderful statement generated from a correct understanding of God's Word on the subject of God's providence. This is intended to provide and even create in us a sense of security, confidence, and peace for our journey in and through this life.

I have decided to write about God's providence for our last two "Points to Ponder" for this week because I think you must believe it and understand it for a passage like Titus 2:9-10 to make any sense or to be palatable at all. How does one adorn the doctrines of God as a bondservant? When you add a passage like 1 Peter 2:18 which tells us that we should show respect to not only the just masters but also the unjust. This is a challenging command and a hard pill to swallow. The only way I can begin to get this right in my own life is to meditate on the providence of God – deeply.

When I consider His providence, I know that from Scripture, nothing comes into my life that isn't first approved or permitted by Him. This means that He could have stopped it, He could have changed it, and He knows my circumstance and suffering. I must then factor in the promises that He is near and will never forsake Me and that He loves me and will never not love me. I have to ponder the fact that ALL things are working good in my life (Rom. 8:28). This and many other promises and truths from God's Word give me strength and a willing heart to yield to His divine will.

Jesus said in John 13:7 these words, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." We have no idea how long the "afterward" may be. Trust His heart when you cannot trace His hand. To trust His heart, it is imperative that you truly know Him. I encourage you to read the 12th chapter of the book of Job to get a better understanding of how Job stood faithfully as well as he did. I am not saying he was perfect in his trials, but he fought in his heart and mind with the truth that he knew about God. It was his knowledge of God that, in part, made what was happening so hard. Still through it all he never lost faith that God was there and it was God who was permitting these hardships in his life. It helps us so much in the valleys to believe in the omnipotent and omnipresent power of God in all of it.

November 1

Hebrews 1:3

I have been slowly working through a large book by a Dutch author from the 17th century named Wilhelmus A'Brakel. The Christian's Reasonable Service Vol. 1 is a monster of a book, but it is a worthwhile endeavor. Recently, I was in a section dealing with the providence of God. In it He said, "The doctrine of the providence of God is of great benefit to those who make proper use of it. A *spiritually* blind, natural, and unconverted person can neither extract any benefit from this doctrine nor obtain comfort from it." I wonder dear one if you can.

For the child of God, there is indeed great value in knowing God is in control of all things and that nothing can happen to us apart from His will. A' Brakel says, "Come, I say, sit beside me for a moment, listen, and let my words enter into your ears and hearts." I love that sweet pastoral heart that longed for his people to rest in the beauty and wonder of this incredible doctrine. Like rays of the sun entering through a window, learn to observe the providential hand of God in all things in heaven and on earth. When you see the sun rise or the moon appearing in the sky, remember that God is controlling all these things and holding all things together by the power of His word (Heb. 1:3).

Friend, when someone treats you well or when they treat you poorly; whether you are healthy or in times of illness; when you win and when you lose; whether you are hitting one tough spot after another or experiencing times of ease and prosperity, keep in mind that ALL these things, from the best to the worst and the least to the greatest, are under God's control. You can't just state it and act like you believe it because that will not help. Endeavor to see God at work in all causes in your life and seek the peace that He provides in this understanding.

Don't waste too much time trying to figure out every way by which God governs because some things are to remain a mystery. Talk about this truth and remind yourself of it often and you will begin to recognize that your life is being attended by God with more comfort and holiness as you go. Learn to look for God's majesty, power, wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. As you acknowledge these attributes in God, it will produce in you a humble fear and reverence for Him. It is a comforting thought and a reason to bow before our Maker. He is the moving cause of all things, and I know He loves me so I can't help but worship Him for His providence in everything that happens.

Friend, creatures both small and great, man and animal, can't move without His energizing power and permission. What can they do to you if He does not will it? The obvious answer is nothing so I can adorn the doctrine of God in my life when I am in good circumstances or bad. One more quote from A' Brakel, "Such proper use of providence yields to the soul a proper perspective and a quiet confidence in God concerning our future." I would add - and in our present too.