

Slaves

Opener: What's something you've learned about yourself while working with others?

Scripture: Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. ⁹And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. Ephesians 6:5-9

We also know that the law is made not . . . for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine. I Timothy 1:9-10

Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession. Exodus 21:16

All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. ²Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves. 1 Timothy 6:1-2

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, ¹⁰and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. Titus 2:9-10

Discussion Questions

1. Slavery was common in the Roman Empire and slaves held many positions—they were teachers, doctors, artists, musicians, etc. Some were born into slavery, some sold themselves into slavery to pay off debts, and others were taken forcibly. How does this impact how we interpret what Paul says about the relationship between slaves and their masters?
2. Why didn't Paul condemn slavery outright or encourage them to revolt? Should he have? What stance does the Bible take on slavery? How does it apply to the sex trafficking we see today? Why do you think Paul addressed this issue? Ephesians 6:5-9; I Timothy 1:9-10 and 6:1-2; Exodus 21:16
3. Although these words were written to slaves and masters, they can also apply to employees and employers. How should our relationship with Christ transform our relationships at work? What exceptions could there be to obeying those with authority over us? Eph. 6:5-8; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Tit. 2:9-10
4. How does God want us to treat people who are under our authority? To what extent should rewards in heaven motivate us? Is this motivation selfish? Why or why not? Ephesians 6:8
5. Why does Paul repeatedly mention that those in and under authority are ultimately accountable to Jesus? How would understanding that change their relationships with one another? Ephesians 6:6, 7, 9
6. How should a Christian view their work, whether they are in authority or under it? How would having a Christlike attitude change our approach to work when it becomes drudgery?
7. How does Ephesians 6:5-9 contribute to the theme of the church glorifying God through visible unity?

Wrap Up: Slavery is never endorsed in the Bible, but a good work ethic is. Whether we are in or under authority, the way we treat others and the quality of our work speaks volumes about our relationship with the Lord. Are we honest even when it costs us? Do we respect authority? Are we kind? Do we work hard even when no one is watching? Do we complain? Do we blame others rather than take responsibility for our mistakes? Do we use profanity? Is it obvious to everyone we work with that we're Christians, or are they shocked when they find out?