

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND FOUR)**

### ***“OBEDIENT AS UNTO CHRIST” (PART THREE)***

#### **EPHESIANS 6:5-9**

*5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;*

*6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;*

*7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:*

*8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.*

*9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.*

In order to remind ourselves of the context of our text, we will begin this evening's Lesson with a extensive quote from **Ray Steadman**:

"The apostle begins this section with the word **slaves** rather than **employees**, and it is, of course true that in the 1st century the relationship was that of **slaves** and **masters**. At the time the apostle wrote this letter it has been estimated that one-half of the population

of the Roman Empire were slaves and many of them were Christians. The Christian message did not come first to the upper or higher classes; it came among the working people and even among slaves. Many of these slaves were highly educated people who had been captured in the war and brought to other parts of the empire and made slaves. They were not unintelligent, but they were slaves, literally in bondage to others. It was among these that the Christian message found its initial reception.

There were also among them some who were in the category of masters who were likewise Christians. As they came together in worship, as the Christian community, they were taught from the Scriptures that in Christ there is neither bond nor free. There is no slavery in Christ, there is no race, there are no sexual distinctions. The Christians all met together as brothers in Jesus Christ. They found that the ground is absolutely level at the foot of the cross. But, of course, when they went back to their homes, and to their work, the question arose: 'Well, what about us now? Are we to continue this relationship as brothers **in our work**? Does this mean that we are to be free from any bondage, or responsibility, to another Christian?' This question soon came up and had to be settled, and this is what the apostle is doing here. He is settling this question and declaring the great principles that apply for all time in the relationship of an employer to an employee.

I do not think it is difficult for us to see that the same principles prevail in the question of management and labor. It is true that employees are no longer slaves. In most of the world, slavery has been eliminated. But it is also true that, in seeking employment, we voluntarily sell our bodies and minds to another for a limited period of time. We work out a mutually agreeable relationship, and, within the limits of that agreement, we are slaves to those to whom we sell our time and our freedom. So the issues are exactly the same. The

question is, 'How should we conduct ourselves toward those to whom we have responsibilities of obedience in the realm of work?'

Here again we are made continually aware of the terrible failure that exists in our day. Periodically, as we know from recent experience, the whole nation is made to suffer because of the quarrels and divisions that exist between capital and labor. Strikes paralyze the nation from time to time, and wreak havoc in our economy. Further, this strife between labor and management is frequently the scene of violence, and even murder. Newspapers are continually reporting the trouble, strife, misery, and bitterness that occurs in this area. What is wrong? Why is there such strife? As we have seen in the other relationships previously discussed, strife is always a symptom of the violation of a fundamental order. It is evidence that something has gone wrong and there is a failure to observe the simple principles that resolve conflict. Those principles, remember, were given to us in one sentence. As the apostle said earlier '*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,*' (**Ephesians 5:21 Revised Standard Version**). That is the whole key."

In verses **5-9**, Paul applies this principle of mutual submission to the relation between slaves and their masters. And he addresses the believing slaves first. In verses **5-8** he says to them,

*5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;*

*6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;*

*7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:*

*8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.*

The **Message** translates the passage as follows:

*5 Servants, respectfully obey your earthly masters but always with an eye to obeying the real master, Christ.*

*6 Don't just do what you have to do to get by, but work heartily, as Christ's servants doing what God wants you to do.*

*7 And work with a smile on your face, always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving the orders, you're really serving God.*

*8 Good work will get you good pay from the Master, regardless of whether you are slave or free.*

**Steadman** observes that, "Four times the idea is put forth: never work for men, you Christians, work only for God. You can work under a man's direction, but remember that you are working unto the Lord, that your daily task is work that he has given you to do, and you do it unto him. What a glory this gives to every task. If you approach your work like this you will never have another dull day. You will never be bored stiff with the routine and humdrum of what you have to do if you recognize that you are doing it with the eye of the Lord upon you, with a desire for his approval, and with the recognition that one day it will be made open and clear to all whether you did it as unto the Lord or unto men."

In a parallel passage in **Colossians 3:22-24** Paul exhorted the slaves in Colossae as follows:

*22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God;*

*23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;*

*24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.*

*25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.*

**(King James Version)**

In the last clause of verse **24**, Paul informs the believing slaves that they serve, “*the Lord Christ.*” The words, “*you serve,*” are a translation of the Greek word **douleuó**: (**dool-yoo’-o**) which means, “to be a slave, to serve, to do service; to obey, to submit to.” The idea is of yielding obedience to one’s master, and rendering to him the services due. In the context of this verse, the master is “*the Lord Christ.*” The word depicts the believing slave as the love slave of Jesus Christ, yielded to His will, and serving for His honour and glory. The verb **douleuó** is either in the **present tense** which pictures our habitual servitude to Christ, or the **present imperative** which is a command for this to be our habitual practice.

Brothers and sisters, this principle is to govern every detail of our service. Our service is not to be rendered at all to our human masters, but exclusively to Christ! A believing employee owes complete obedience to his or her employer as a ministry to the Lord.

**Spurgeon** remarks that, “This saying ennobles the weary routine of earthly employments, and sheds a halo around the most humble occupations. To wash feet may be servile, but to wash His feet is royal work. To unloose the shoe-latchet is poor employ, but to unloose the great Master’s shoe is a princely privilege. The shop, the barn, the scullery, and the smithy become temples when men and women do all to the glory of God! Then ‘divine service’ is not a thing of a few hours and a few places, but all life becomes holiness unto the Lord, and every place and thing, as consecrated as the tabernacle and its golden candlestick.”

In **1 Peter 2:18-23**, the Apostle Peter also addresses the matter of how believing slaves should relate to their earthly masters. The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows:

*18 You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, **but even if they are cruel.***

*19 For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment.*

*20 Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. **But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently,** God is pleased with you.*

*21 For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.*

*22 He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.*

*23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.*

The word “*slaves*” in verse **18** is a translation of the Greek word **oiketes**: (**oy-ket’-ace**). The word is a reference to **household slaves** or **domestic servants** who were not as subservient as a **doulos**. Many of these household or domestic slaves were well educated and held responsible positions in the households. Many of them were doctors, teachers, musicians, actors and stewards over great estates.

The **oiketes** or household slave was one who generally held closer relations to the family than other slaves. He or she was regarded almost as a member of the household, and yet in order to promote harmonious relations, Peter urges him or her to submit to those in authority. He says that the household slave should submit to their masters, “*with all respect.*” And they were to do so whether their masters were kind and reasonable, or cruel.

The word “*cruel*” is a translation of the Greek word **skolios**: (**skol-ee-os**’), which literally means, “crooked or curved.” The **skolios** comes over into English in the form of the word **scoliosis**, which is a medical condition involving an abnormal curvature and misalignment of the spine. Paul uses the word figuratively here to refer to a perversity for turning away from the truth. It speaks of a person who is morally crooked, bent or twisted, and thus unscrupulous, unprincipled, dishonest, and unfair. In the present verse the context conveys the idea of being severe, hard to deal with, unjust, cruel, ill-tempered, harsh.

**Kenneth Wuest** makes the following remarks in respect of these “*cruel*” masters: “The masters had their faces dead set against these Christian slaves. We can understand that attitude when we remember that these slaves lived lives of singular purity, meekness, honesty, willingness to serve, and obedience in the households of their heathen masters. This was a powerful testimony for the gospel, and brought them under conviction of sin. All this irritated them, and they reacted in a most unpleasant way toward their slaves, whom they would punish without provocation. Yet they did not want to sell these Christian slaves and buy pagan ones, for the Christian slaves served them better. So they just had to make the best of the situation.”

A “*cruel*” master might use his or her power over a slave to inflict severe punishments, withhold wages and cause his or her slaves to live in deplorable conditions. It would be virtually impossible for a believing slave to respectfully and obediently serve such a master without the continual filling of the indwelling Spirit of God! Peter encouraged loyalty and perseverance even in the face of unjust treatment. It will be impossible for us today to render whole-hearted service to “*cruel*” employers if we are not continually “*filled with the Spirit.*” We too need the same enabling power and grace to comply.

**Kenneth Wuest** notes that, “The **unsaved** slave would react toward unjust punishment in a surly, rebellious, sullen, vindictive manner. That would be the expected and ordinary thing. But Peter exhorts these

**Christian** slaves to be obedient to these unjust and cruel masters, and when punished unjustly to behave in a meek, patient, and forgiving manner. This would be an action beyond the ordinary course of what might be expected, and would therefore be commendable. The motive for acting thus, Peter tells them, is *'for conscience toward God.'* The idea here is not that of conscientiousness in the ordinary sense, but of the Christian slave's conscious sense of his relation to God. He has a testimony to maintain before his pagan master. He has the Lord Jesus Christ to emulate and reflect in his life."

**Spurgeon** says, "There is no credit in suffering rightfully; the credit is in patiently enduring suffering, which you do not deserve."

Brothers and sisters, God expects us to do our job not primarily for our employer but for Himself. What is our attitude toward our jobs? What is our state of mind toward our employers?

**William Barclay** has a wonderfully helpful commentary on this passage in **1 Peter 2**. He writes,

"The dominant fact in the life of a slave was that, even if he was well treated, he remained a **thing**. He did not possess even the elementary rights of a person and for him justice did not even exist. Into this situation came Christianity with its message that every man was precious in the sight of God. The result was that within the Church the social barriers were broken down....The great majority of the early Christians were humble folk and many of them were slaves. It was quite possible in the early days that the **slave** should be the **president** of the congregation and the **master** a **member** of it. This was a new and revolutionary situation. It had its glory and it had its dangers....

Suppose both master and servant became Christians; there arose the danger that the slave might presume upon the new relationship and make an excuse for shirking his work, assuming that since he and his



master were both Christians, he could get away with anything. That situation is by no means at an end. There are still people who trade on the goodwill of a Christian master and think that the fact that both they and their employers are Christians gives them a right to dispense with discipline and punishment. But Peter is quite clear. **The relationship between Christian and Christian does not abolish the relationship between man and man.** The Christian must, indeed, be a better workman than anyone else. His Christianity is not a reason for claiming exemption from discipline; it should bring him under self-discipline and make him more conscientious than anyone else....

Peter was concerned that Christian slaves should demonstrate to the world that their Christianity did not make them disgruntled rebels but rather workmen who had found a new inspiration towards doing an honest day's work. It will still often happen that, when some situation cannot at the time be changed, the Christian duty is to be a Christian within that situation and to accept what cannot be changed until the leaven has worked....

Christianity introduced a new attitude to work. It is the conviction of the New Testament that all work must be done for Jesus Christ....In the Christian ideal work is not done for an earthly master or for personal prestige or to make so much money; it is done for God. It is, of course, true that a man must work in order to earn a wage and he must work to satisfy a master; but beyond that there is for the Christian the conviction that his work must be done well enough to be able to show it to God without shame.

But.... suppose a man has the Christian attitude to men and to work and is treated with injustice, insult and injury-what then? Peter's great answer is that this is exactly what happened to Jesus. He was none other than the Suffering Servant. **1 Peter 2:21-25** are full of reminiscences and quotations of **Isaiah 53:1-12**, the supreme picture of the Suffering Servant of God, which came to life in Jesus. He was

without sin and yet he was insulted and he suffered; but he accepted the insults and the suffering with serene love and bore them for the sins of mankind.”

Brothers and sisters, this is **authentic** Christianity; this is **intense** Christianity; this is **hard-core** Christianity; this is **biblical** Christianity. God Almighty recognizes no other, and He will be pleased with no other. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to fill us continually, by surrendering continually to Him, so that we can work out the kind of life that He is working in us.