

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

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND THREE)

“OBEDIENT AS UNTO CHRIST” (PART TWO)

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 our previous Lesson, we examined verse 5 of our text: “*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.*”

We said that the word “*servants,*” is a translation of the Greek word **doulos**: (**doo’-los**), which describes a person who is bound to another in servitude. In the Greek culture, the word **doulos** usually referred to the involuntary, permanent service of a slave. In this verse, Paul is addressing believing slaves who were working, for the most part, for

unbelieving masters. These believers were not only the slaves of an **earthly** master but they were also slaves of a **heavenly** Master. As slaves of Christ they were to be totally surrendered to His will, which in context, called for a continual willingness to be filled with, and therefore controlled by, the Holy Spirit in order to carry out the command to be obedient to their **earthly** masters.

We made the point that the first-century master-slave relationship parallels the employer-employee relationship in our day. As in the relationships between wives and husbands, and children and parents, the principle Paul is emphasizing is that of authority and submission as a manifestation of one who is filled with, and therefore controlled by, the Holy Spirit.

The word “*obedient*” is a translation of the Greek word **hupakouó**: (**hoop-ak-oo’-o**) which literally means, “under the hearing,” or “to listen under.” The idea is of listening with attentiveness and then responding positively to what is heard. The sense is that one listens with a readiness to carry out what has been requested or commanded. It implies an **inward attitude** of respect and honour, as well as the **external act** of obedience. The word pictures the one hearing as being under the authority of someone else.

The believing slaves are urged to obey their earthly masters, “*with fear and trembling.*” The phrase expresses a desire to not come short of the discharge of one’s duty. The idea is not so much of a dread of the master himself, but of a genuine respect for his authority and consequently, a desire to leave no duty undone. We may say that the idea behind the phrase, “*with fear and trembling*” is of a passion to please. The application for those of us who are employees is that we be careful to avoid saying or doing anything that would cause our employers to think or speak disparagingly of Jesus Christ, His Church, or His Gospel.

Paul urges the believing slaves to obey their earthly masters, not only “*with fear and trembling,*” but also “*in singleness of...heart, as unto*

Christ.” The phrase “*in singleness of heart,*” qualifies the spirit, or the attitude in which the obedience of the believing slaves was to be rendered to their masters. Their obedience was not to be characterized by formality, pretence, or hypocrisy, but by sincerity, and an whole-hearted service.

The importance of the phrase, “*as unto Christ.*” Cannot be overstated. The obedience of the believing slave is to be rendered to his or her earthly master as if his or her earthly master were the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! The believing slave is to labour for his earthly master, with the same attitude and service as if he or she were working for Christ! We who are employees must do the same!

What does the phrase, “*in singleness of your heart*” mean in the context of the master-slave, employer-employee relationship? Paul answers this question in verse 6. He writes, “*Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*”

In the context of the master-slave, employer-employee relationship, the phrase, “*in singleness of your heart,*” refers to faithful, whole-hearted **service** that reflects a faithful, whole-hearted **regard**, not only for their earthly masters, but for their heavenly master as well. Such service has nothing to do with an outward show that conceals a dishonourable inner motivation. In other words, when a believing slave or employee who is Spirit-filled obeys his or her earthly master, it is not a sham obedience but a genuine obedience. There is no pretense, no ulterior motive. It is obedience, “*as unto Christ.*”

The word “*eyeservice*” is the translation of a Greek word which literally means, “sight-labour,” or “eye slavery!” It refers to service performed under the master’s eye only. It is service rendered only for the sake of appearance. This is service that is performed only to make an impression in the owner’s presence. It describes work done without dedication or a sense of inner obligation but primarily to impress and to attract attention. Slaves were under more temptation in this respect than paid labourers since they had nothing to gain materially from their diligence. A

believing slave who was filled with the Spirit, would not render “*eyeservice*” to his or her master.

The word “*menpleasers*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “studying to please men, courting the favour of men.” The word refers to an impressionist, a people-pleaser who is desirous of serving to be seen and recognized by human beings, as opposed to being seen and recognized by God.

Paul forbids believing slaves from rendering service for the sake of appearance only, in order to be seen and recognized by people. Instead He exhorts them, “*as the servants of Christ,*” to do “*the will of God from the heart.*” The Greek word translated “*servants*” here in verse 6, is the same word translated “*servants*” in the previous verse. The word is **doulos**: (**doo’-los**), which refers to one bound to another.

The word refers to one **born** into slavery. We were born into sin’s slavery by our first birth. When we were **born-again**, or **born from above**, we were born into the position of a loving bond-slave of the Lord Jesus by the new birth.

The word refers to one who is in a relation to another **which only death can break**. Our relation to Satan, our former master, was broken by our identification with Christ **in His death**. We now are in a relation to Jesus Christ which will last forever, since **Christ can never die again**, and our life is “*hid with Christ in God*” (**Colossians 3:3**). Indeed, Christ “*is our life!*” (**Colossians 3:4**)

The word refers to one **whose will is swallowed up in the will of another**. Our will was at one time swallowed up in the will of Satan. Now our will is swallowed up in the sweet will of God.

The word refers to one **who serves another even to the disregard of his own interests**. Formerly, we served Satan to the detriment of our own interests. Now we serve the Lord Jesus with a reckless abandon, not regarding our own interests. This is certainly how the Apostle Paul

served his divine master. The following two passages testify eloquently of this fact. Both passages reflect the rendering of the **New English Translation**:

Acts 20:22-24

22 And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem without knowing what will happen to me there,

23 except that the Holy Spirit warns me in town after town that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me.

24 But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

Acts 21:10-13

10 While we remained there for a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

11 He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and said, "The Holy Spirit says this: 'This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will tie up the man whose belt this is, and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

12 When we heard this, both we and the local people begged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be tied up, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Every true believer is a bond-slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to Him by the chains of a compelling love.

Brothers and sisters, a slave usually has no higher aim than to please his or her slave master because the master has the right to do anything he wants with the slave, including punishing, selling and even killing the

slave. The slave will therefore endeavour to please his or her master and this is usually done, “*with eyeservice, as menpleasers.*” But Paul presents to believing slaves another and deeper motivation, which should lead them to render faithful, whole-hearted service to their masters. He says that they are to work, not as the slaves of men, but as the slaves of Christ. As the bond-slaves of Christ, we are called upon to do, “*the will of God from the heart.*”

Warren Wiersbe writes that, “Doing a good job is the will of God. Christianity knows nothing of sacred and secular. A Christian can perform any good work as a ministry to Christ to the glory of God. For this reason, the worker must do his job ‘*from the heart,*’ since he is serving Christ and doing the will of God. There were tasks assigned to these slaves that they detested, but they were to perform them just the same, so long as they were not disobeying the will of God. ‘*Singleness of heart*’ and ‘*doing the will of God from the heart*’ both indicate the importance of a right heart attitude on the job.”

Brothers and sisters, we must always remember that while our employers may not always be observing us, our Master in heaven is always looking. There is a natural tendency for us to do less work when we are not being supervised, but this is a form of dishonesty. As one commentator noted, “The Christian’s standards of performance should not vary according to the geographical location of the foreman.” A customer once urged a believing sales clerk to give him more of a certain product than he was paying for. The customer assured the clerk that his employer was not looking. But the clerk replied, “My Master is always looking!”

Martin Luther King once famously said, “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

What a remarkable statement! And yet the Holy Spirit demands even more of those whom He indwells! He demands that, the believer, if he is a street sweeper, should sweep streets ***“as unto Christ!”*** He should sweep the city streets as if Christ were the mayor of the city! If he is a gardener, he should mow the lawn, trim the hedges and rake-up the leaves as if Christ owned the property! If he is a banker, he or she should operate and carry out every transaction as if all the money deposited in the bank belonged to Christ! **1 Corinthians 10:31** should be every believers inspiration and challenge in every area of life: *“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God”* (New English Translation).

William Barclay once said, “Every single piece of work the Christian produces must be good enough to show to God.”

Brothers and sisters, if render service to our earthly masters, *“as unto Christ,”* and as *“the servants of Christ,”* we will obey the exhortation of **Ephesians 6:7**, *“With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”* In other words, the spirit of our service is to be Christian. Externally, our service is to human beings, but in motive and spirit our service is to the Lord.

Commenting on **Ephesians 6:6-7**, **John Phillips** wrote the following: “All service is on a higher plane for believers. We are in God’s will when we do ‘secular’ work, just as much as when we do ‘sacred’ work. The Holy Spirit...abolishes the distinction between those of us in secular employment and those of us in fulltime Christian service. **All of us are in the ministry. All of us are in fulltime service**-the plumber as much as the preacher, the economist as much as the evangelist, the policeman as much as the pastor, and the miner as much as the missionary. All these vocations are in God’s will, and God’s will must be done from the heart.”

The encouragement for us to serve our earthly masters as if we were serving the Lord Jesus Christ, is found in the fact that whatever good we

do for them will be rewarded. Paul informs us of this in **Ephesians 6:8**. He writes, *“Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.”*

Brothers and sisters, this is the ultimate motivation for serving the Lord, in whatever vocation we are called to serve. A believer who diligently does his job, *“as unto the Lord,”* will be rewarded. Our employer may not appreciate what we do. He or she may not even be aware of all that we do, but God is aware of everything we do, and He is the only One who can accurately and impartially judge our performance and our motivation. Since nothing escapes our heavenly Master’s notice, we can trust Him to reward us faithfully. In **2 Corinthians 5:10** Paul writes, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil”* (**New English Translation**). This verse clearly indicates that there is a relationship between what we do and how we are rewarded by God. And Social status will have nothing to do with that evaluation.

Brothers and sisters, in verses **5-8**, Paul is urging Spirit filled believers to serve on the job **“coram Deo.”** This phrase literally refers to something that takes place in the presence of God, or before the face of God. To live **“coram Deo”** is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and for the glory of God.

R.C. Sproul, stated that, *“The big idea of the Christian life is **coram Deo**. **Coram Deo** captures the essence of the Christian life.”* He went on to say the following:

"To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze....

To live all of life **coram Deo** is to live a life of integrity. It is a life of wholeness that finds its unity and coherency in the majesty of God. A fragmented life is a life of disintegration. It is marked by inconsistency, disharmony, confusion, conflict, contradiction, and chaos.

The Christian who compartmentalizes his or her life into two sections of the religious and the nonreligious has failed to grasp the big idea. **The big idea is that all of life is religious or none of life is religious. To divide life between the religious and the nonreligious is itself a sacrilege.**

This means that if a person fulfills his or her vocation as a steelmaker, attorney, or homemaker **coram Deo**, then that person is acting every bit as religiously as a soul-winning evangelist who fulfills his vocation. It means that David was as religious when he obeyed God's call to be a shepherd as he was when he was anointed with the special grace of kingship. It means that Jesus was every bit as religious when He worked in His father's carpenter shop as He was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Integrity is found where men and women live their lives in a pattern of consistency. It is a pattern that functions the same basic way in church and out of church. It is a life that is open before God. It is a life in which all that is done is done as to the Lord. It is a life lived by principle, not expediency; by humility before God, not defiance. It is a life lived under the tutelage of conscience that is held captive by the Word of God. **Coram Deo** . . . before the face of God. That's the big idea. Next to this idea our other goals and ambitions become mere trifles."