

Submission in Christian ethics - work

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[0 : 00] They say when you're public speaking, you've got seven seconds to grab people's attention. Yeah, that's as much as I can muster. I haven't got anything funny to say.

Let's just jump into the text. So immediately as we jump into this text, we're challenged. Just the very first word, slaves. So on the surface, this is very jarring, isn't it, to us? The society that we live in today doesn't openly allow slavery.

And it brings things to mind. Like what's on the screen. Kidnapping, cruelty, prostitution, injustice, corruption.

Liam Neeson films, for those who watch movies, often encompasses these kind of themes. Ephesians was written most likely around 60 AD.

[1 : 09] Slavery was already well established and accepted as a practice in those times. But it looked a lot different from what we see today, what we know as slavery today.

Slaves were often given a wage. And it's given them, it's opened up the option for them for freedom. They come from various backgrounds.

Convicted criminals were often slaves. They were sent into hard labor. Whereas people who might have, there would be people that might have gone into slavery because of debt.

It may well have been, or there was actually, house slaves. Who were treated much better than what you would expect, as we would think a slave is treated today. They didn't have any legal rights.

They were 100% the property of their masters. This draws the definition of slave away from what we know a little bit and brings it into an area of what we would call service.

[2 : 24] As opposed to that outright forced labor that we would expect when we're thinking of slavery.

So, we can read this text and we're forced to ask the question, aren't we? Does or does not the Bible condone slavery? Is it saying it's a great thing?

We don't hear that word a lot. When we come on a Sunday, we don't hear the word slave a lot when we're studying the word. Or so we think. In fact, we do, actually.

So, the Greek word used for slavery is a word called *doulos*. And it appears 127 times in the New Testament. More often than not, it's translated as the word servant.

Some text on the screen. Romans 1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 35] Matthew 25, 23, one that we're probably more familiar with. His master said to him, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little.

I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. Philippians 2, 4 to 7. We read something of this this morning.

Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.

Amen. All of these servant words that we see are that word *doulos*. It's a go-to argument for atheists.

I know this firsthand. Some of you might not know my background. That's the background I come from. God's word, it tells us how to handle slavery.

[4 : 36] It doesn't tell us that it's okay to lord power over someone. And treat them however we want to. In fact, just as we read in these verses, in Ephesians, there is no favoritism with God.

Slave or free. That's verse 8, verse 9. I'm going to be, during this time, jumping about in the Bible a little bit. If you're quick, you might be able to keep up.

Don't feel you have to. It says in Job, book of Job, in chapter 31, 13. If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or maidservant, when they made a complaint against me, what will I do when God rises to judge me?

How will I answer when called to account? Did not he who made me in the womb also make them? Did not the same one form us in the womb?

God isn't looking for your status. It's not a prerequisite. He is looking for you to serve him.

[5 : 48] We go back, we look at verse 9 in Ephesians 6. 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.

God is actually calling for equality in this dynamic of service and work. That's the first word of our text tonight.

I hope that shows that what we think of as slaves directly is a little different from what this context is. That then brings to us a question, what does that mean for us today?

Verse 5. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

So the first part of this text is aimed at servants. The second part of the text is telling us how to serve.

[7 : 12] Let's look at this word, obey. So the word in Greek, excuse me, it sounds like something like hupakouo. I'm no expert, as you can tell.

And it means, really interestingly, to listen and to answer. Which is actually a lot less threatening than what we see there.

We heard this from Jerome last week in the beginning of Ephesians 6.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. That makes sense, doesn't it, for children to listen and to respond. It's what we expect.

Matthew 8, 27. And the men marveled, saying, What sort of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?

[8 : 15] That gives a wonderful new insight to that verse. We've heard that verse a lot. We can picture God's creation listening and responding to his word.

So if we are to listen and to respond, we need to know who exactly are we listening and responding to. Who are our earthly masters, as it says in the text?

It'd be easy for us to write this off and say, I'm not a slave. I don't consider myself a servant. It doesn't apply to me.

You can go on about your life doing what you do. We know that no scripture is vestigial. That is to say, there's nothing in the Bible that is rendered useless through age or through circumstance.

It says in 2 Timothy 3, 16, All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

[9 : 38] It's all scripture. 1 Peter 1, 24-25 says, For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever, all time. I remember once I opened a really old bottle of port.

I was expecting it to be amazing. It wasn't. It had all bits in it and aged terribly. These earthly things age like that. This broken world that we live in, ages like that.

Not the same with the word. When we look at the text in Ephesians 6, as a whole, we see there's two groups of people.

There's slaves and there's masters. Servants and free men. I think it would be fair to say that most people I know under the age of 60 has to work.

[10 : 47] We work to pay bills. We work to eat. We work for nice things. That usually involves serving somebody in some way. So how do we do that effectively?

It says in the text, to obey. So to listen and to respond with respect and fear. If you're reading another translation, the ESV, for example, might say fear and trembling and sincerity of heart.

You might be thinking, really? Should I really be afraid of my manager? Maybe you already are.

really what these words equate to is the things that go alongside with that. So respect and reverence. Matthew 10 says, do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

So when you put those together, the logical conclusion would be that it's the respect that we need to have for the authority.

[11 : 59] We're not called to be afraid of people but we are called to serve with respect. And to do it with sincerity.

Notice three times in a row in the text. We're told to serve Jesus from the heart. Ephesians 6 verse 5, with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

Verse 6, as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Verse 7, serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord.

Lord. This is a commandment. We respect and serve our authorities, bosses, Lord Jesus, with all of our heart.

Not just the little bit that's left over when we're finished griping and complaining about how inefficient they are, how rubbish they are at their job.

[13 : 03] We've all done it. sincerity means to serve them and not yourself.

Verse 6, obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you. There's a particular way in serving. One leads to sincere service for somebody else.

The other leads to yourself. I like the way the ESV translates it. Not by the way of eye service. service. That's not the way you go. As people please.

If you're only serving to make yourself look good, then the only person you're serving is yourself. But if you're doing the will of God from all your heart, your service will be successful.

The very next verse tells us because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do. not that we're doing it for the reward.

[14 : 11] Ultimately, we're not looking for rewards from men. Matthew 6 tells us that we cannot serve two masters. I think specifically it's talking about money, but in any circumstance, your heart has to be with Lord Jesus.

Serve people with a heart for the Lord and your reward will be much richer than anything any man can give you or any woman. That's serving as servants or slaves.

What about the masters? Verse 9 in Ephesians 6 says that there's a shift in the dynamic that is counterintuitive.

and it says I believe that God is for equality. The very opposite of what the world says of him today. All these things that we can learn about serving with all of our heart focused on Jesus. This is for masters too. Masters, treat your slaves in the same way.

[15 : 25] 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. See, the world says that equality means we all deserve the same high status but we must serve ourselves first.

That's what the world says. God says it doesn't matter what your status is. What you need to do is serve each other. it's the very opposite of what we see today particularly in Brighton.

And this brings up a very common objection that we'll all find asking ourselves at some point and that is why work?

Why do it? Why do we work? What kind of work should we be doing? So I want to look at the origin of work.

The origin of work goes right back to the beginning of mankind with Adam. We'll be looking at Genesis 2 and Genesis 3 for the time here. Verse 15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

[16 : 47] And the Lord God commanded the man you're free to eat from any tree in the garden but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it you will certainly die to work and take care of it.

Anybody guess what that word for work means in the Hebrew? Apparently it's a word called orbad and it means to serve.

and the second word is shoma and it means to observe to keep. I think it's more than reasonable to say that when God initially put Adam on the earth he was expected to work.

I think that's what that says. You might say Aaron that doesn't sound like a lot of fun to me. And I would say look at the context.

Adam was placed in a beautiful garden that was full of trees both pleasing to the eye and good for food and he had one rule he had a lady helper that was handmade for him quite literally and his boss was God himself alongside him.

[18 : 10] Does that not sound like the perfect job? You won't find that on totaljobs.com So what happened?

Well Adam and Eve broke that one rule which switched humanity into a state of sin. Something that was made to be perfect is now corrupted by not obeying.

Go back to that word again. They used to have a game on my PC called Command and Conquer. I loved that game and the files became corrupted and more and more I found I had to keep changing its environment to get it to work properly and eventually it stopped working altogether.

It actually sounds like a few colleagues I've known in the past now I think about. But it's not dissimilar to what's happened to the human race. We flick over to Genesis 3 we see the result of Adam and Eve's disobedience.

Guess what the very first results are? Sorry I forgot to go through the slides. Nubiera. But Eve with painful labor you'll give birth to children.

[19 : 35] The word used there in the Hebrew means to toil or to work extremely hard. For Adam curses the ground because of you. Through painful toil you'll eat food from it.

Suddenly that paradise is gone and we're left with hard work. By the sweat of your brow you'll eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken.

For dust you are and to dust you will return. God commands us to work. There's no escape in this while we're here.

He made us to work and through humanity's disobedience work got a whole lot tougher. But that doesn't mean that we can ignore it and continue in not obeying.

I'd like to read to you a section from 2 Thessalonians. Paul writes, He also goes on to repeat this later in the text.

[20 : 58] Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. God's word is telling us to serve and to work hard.

We need to obey and to work hard. I could go on. There's lots more verses in the Bible that talk about working hard and how that's what we should be doing.

But it doesn't quite hit the point, does it? There's still something very essential missing in all of this. That's the reason, the very center of the reason why we have to work hard.

It tells us why we have to work hard, but it's not giving us that center point. Because we can't focus on serving without looking really at who we're serving.

So far we've looked at the meaning of the word slave. We've looked at what that means for us today and we've looked at a command to work and a very brief history of where that comes from, which leaves us one more blank to fill in, and that is who are we serving?

[22 : 14] Let's go back to our text in Ephesians 6, verse 9. It's right there in verse 6.

We serve as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from our hearts. So in our service to earthly masters and authorities, God is saying, actually, it's me you're serving.

And I will reward you, whether you're slave or free. And I'm going to say to you, who better to have as a master than the very master who is there right at the beginning?

The master of slaves and the master of masters. The master that came as a servant himself, who knows what it's like to serve, to the absolute fullest that anybody can serve.

That's to death. And being found in the appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

[23 : 35] We heard this again this morning. And for us, no less. man, he rose. But on the third day, Jesus rose again.

And he proved that actually he's master over death as well. 1 Peter 2, 22 to 25 says, he committed no sin. No deceit was found in his mouth.

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed.

For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. I love these verses. Because there is who we are serving. a servant that gave his life for us.

[24 : 41] To heal us from the very sin that was caused by our disobedience in the first place. And guess what the result is? Freedom.

I always think of that brave heart scene when I look at that slide. We can shout that louder, I believe. Romans 6:22 says, but now that you have been set free from sin, you have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life.

I'm going to say that if you're not a Christian, you need to come and work for this boss. you'll never be happier in your work if you do.

And to my brothers and sisters, if you're struggling with work, then the master knows your struggles. He sees them all. I'm going to remind you that Jesus is who we work hard for.

He's a master that takes punishment for us. He's a master that conquers death for us. He's a master that heals us. He's a master that forgives us. He's a master that shepherds us.

[26 : 07] He's a master that takes us by the hand and leads us back to the garden to serve him forever. Amen.