

## Spirit-filled Slaves and Masters – *Ephesians 6:5-9*

**Introduction** – We come to the end of a subsection of this epistle which has provided instruction to us in our familial relationships up to this point. But in the ancient church, the relationship of slaves and masters was also a relationship that was a part of the familial relationships. What falls on us as entirely weird, and yet has application for us, is Paul's assumption that slaves and their masters might be attending the same church, both filled with the Holy Spirit. There is much to explore here.

**Slavery and the Scriptures** – Paul is addressing slaves, *douloi*, and not simply hired servants. He did not demand the release of all slaves, even under the pagan Roman system of slavery which was full of horrible abuse. This is not because Paul was culturally bound or wouldn't address the tough issues. It was because Paul understood that the nature of the Gospel is reformatory and not revolutionary. We must never apologize for the Bible; and slaves are commanded to obey their masters. A cursory review of how Britain abolished slavery (i.e. the work of William Wiberforce) and how America abolished slavery (i.e. >600,000 lives) is only one application. How we deal with present cultural issues (i.e. abortion, homosexuality) is another. The Fall brought us all under bondage, slaves to sin (Rom 6:6-7). Christ died on the cross to set all men free from sin, and all forms of external and physical slavery are built on the bedrock of slavery to sin. The Great Commission, the gospel to the world, meant the eventual death to slavery as an institution. And so we see the seeds of the destruction of slavery in the New Testament. Paul requires a radical view for masters towards their slaves (in his day). He tells slaves to remain in their calling as slaves and to be content, all the while exhorting them to take advantage if an opportunity comes to be made free (1 Cor 7:20-24). Paul does not command Philemon to free his slave, Onesimus, who had run away. Paul sends him back and Onesimus goes. Paul does say to treat him as Paul's "*son*" and now as Philemon's "*beloved brother*." He even hints that Philemon will "*do even more than I say*" (Philemon 10, 12, 16, 21).

**Spirit-filled Slaves and Masters** - Slaves are told to obey their masters with fear and trembling, to do so sincerely as rendered to their Master Christ (v5). They are not to work for show but with whole-hearted service as slaves to Christ knowing they are doing God's will (v6). They are to do so with goodwill towards their masters as though they were serving their Master, because they are (v7), knowing that all they do will be reckoned and rewarded by their good Master (v8). Paul then tells masters that they must have the same mentality towards their slaves, that they must not take advantage of their authority with any use of threatenings, knowing that they are slaves themselves and have a Master in heaven who shows no partiality (v9).

**Submission and Sacrifice – Again** – The scripture does not speak so much about lines of authority but rather lines of submission. Whenever we are submitting to an existing authority it is to be with a view of submitting to Christ. Whenever we are in authority, we are to remember first that the authority is delegated to us as slaves under submission ourselves to God. We are also to learn from Christ what godly leadership does. Its purpose is to serve, to lay down, to provide – to love and sacrifice.

**The Difficult Truth about Human Authority** – When Christ becomes our spiritual Master that does not mean that we can disregard our masters in the flesh. Christianity is not anarchy. Actually, quite the opposite (and now you can think of work-type relationships as a fitting present-day application). The Gospel provides the means of a transformation in the relationships of submission and authority but it does so without an ungodly egalitarianism which destroys society.

**A Fortiori** – If this is how Christian slaves are to behave, how much more Christian employees? If this is how Christian masters are to behave, how much more Christian employers? Any human in authority will be imperfect and will from time to time abuse their authority; this is an imperfect world. How are you to treat your crude, irrational boss who thinks the world revolves around him? You are working for Jesus. How are you to treat those employees whom you could easily threaten and take advantage of? You are working for the Father and they are His children.

**The Gospel of Liberty** – Outside of Christ, we are all slaves to sin, and a people who are slaves to sin will have slaves in their society (and let us not kid ourselves, we have slaves in our society). Only the Gospel sets us free. Free men, free from sin and its bondage will, be a people who grant freedom over time. And only free men will truly treat their fellow men as image-bearers of the God Who has freed them.

**Final Call** – All of these commands (5:22 – 6:9) are given to those who are first overflowing from the work of the Giver of Abundant and Eternal Life. If slaves are to live in their roles with godliness towards their masters, how much more so are children to their parents and wives to their husbands? If masters are to consider their authority over their slaves as an opportunity to serve, how much more are fathers to give themselves in service to their children, bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, and how much more are husbands to lay their lives down lovingly for their brides? This is what the Gospel does; this is what Christendom looks like.