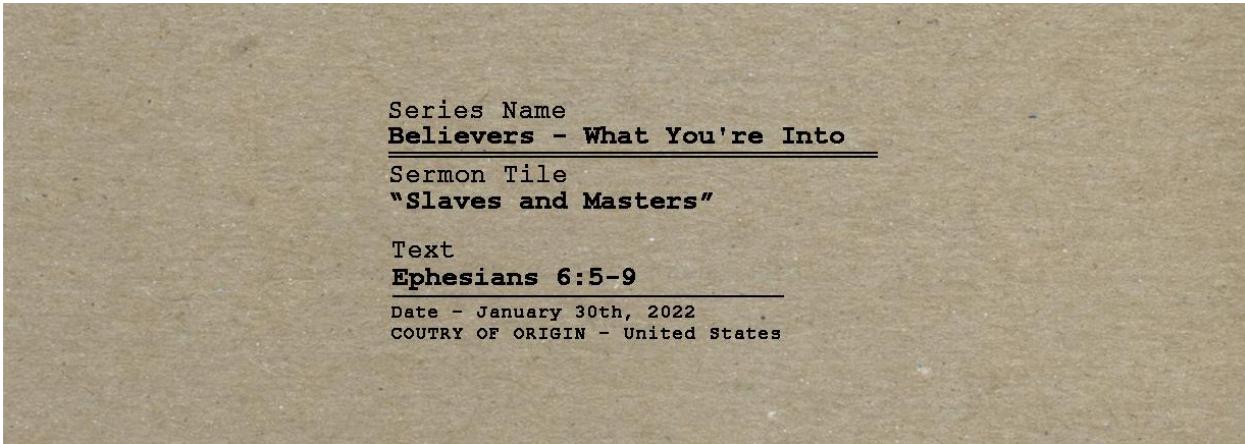


# "Slaves and Masters"



## Ephesians 6:5-9

*Bondservants, obey your earthly masters[b] with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master[c] and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.*

Video of Sermon is available [HERE](#).

Sermon Transcription:

Dr. Stewart

Good morning. We're going to look at Ephesians 6:5-9 on slaves and masters. Work, you know, it always seems to be there, it's kind of just waiting, kind of staring you in the face. I'd really like to have a day off. In fact, you know, I even obsess a little bit and I start looking at my weather app about the snow that's coming in, and I'm telling my son about it, because it's saying there is a lot coming. It always changes though, as you get closer, because they can predict a little better. But I'd kind of like to have a day off. A day to relax in my lazy boy and kick back and do what I want to do. You know, I remember as a kid, my job was to mow the yard. And at first it was kind of cool to do, you felt kind of big, but then it got kind of old, you know, and I started to hate it a little bit. Our mower was a push mower with a pull start and it didn't have one of those electric starts, you know. And so in the fall, it would get colder, and it was really hard to start. And so I would tell myself, I'll try and kick it over 5 times, or 10 times. And then, if it didn't start, I mean, it wasn't gonna start right. It won't start, I'm done. I'd go hang out with my friends. The yard needed to be mowed. It was kind of shaggy and my parents were kind of ticked off. And my effort, pulling the starter, was a little less than a full effort. It was kind of a little half hearted. I was a bit lazy about this. I really didn't want the mower to start. But you know, when I went with my friends, I felt kind of guilty. Guilty, leaving the

job undone. I learned, as I grew older, there was satisfaction in a job well done. Tony Evans says this, When God created Adam, he gave him a job to work and watch over the garden. That's Genesis 2:5.

Work then came before the fall. Everything God created, including work, was good. But after the fall, Adam sinned and work like a lot of things became corrupted. One part of works corruption is slavery. So I want to spend a little time this morning talking to you about slavery in its historic context to give us a little insite for this passage. So bear with me as we do that, it will take just a little bit. So what do you think of when you think of slavery? Yeah, American history. So what comes to your mind? Chains, black slaves, hard work, abuse, a war that came out of that, terrible abuse, people that were treated as property and not people. You know, most of what we know slavery is antebellum slavery, it's what we've been giving examples about. The Africans slavery in the United States, it was also in Europe and in South America. This type of slavery was condemned in the Bible, human beings were not to be kidnapped or sold, Exodus 21:16, "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death". Is that pretty straightforward? I mean, you can't get any more straight than that. This type of slavery is wicked. Slaves were not to be abused. Even in Exodus it gives guidelines, Exodus 21:26-27, "When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth". You weren't to abuse them. Fugitive slaves were not to be returned to their master, Deuteronomy 23:15-16, "You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him".

You know, in the time Paul writes to us from Ephesus, the first century slavery was very different than in American history. As a whole, Roman slavery was an unrighteous institution. Let's take a look at that in Paul's day to get a perspective of who his audience was that he writes to here as slaves and masters. And then we'll apply the passage to our work today. From The Christ Centered Commentary by David Platt, and some other authors, it says the situation Paul addressed was not like slavery in American history. It was even more complex and massive in scope. American slavery was primarily racial and lifelong. In Paul's day, it was not racial, and it was not always lifelong. It was estimated in the Roman Empire, there were 16 million slaves around the time that Paul writes. A third of the people in Ephesus were slaves at the time that he writes this. They did not merely do menial work. They did nearly all the work, including oversight and management of most professions. Some slaves were more educated than their owners and they could own property, even slaves and were allowed to save money to buy freedom. No slave class existed. For slaves were present in all the highest of economic and social classes. Many gained freedom by age 30. Casson, in his book says, Everyday life in ancient Rome gave firsthand accounts of slavery, there were multitudes of Greek and Roman slaves. There were gangs in the mines, or in the vast ranches, who lived full of hardship, just as the slaves on the sugar plantations of Brazil or the cotton plantations in America. But in the days of the Roman Empire, there were also a great many who were able to escape from slavery and mount the steps of the social ladder, in some cases, to the very top. Some examples again from Casson, "I was no bigger than a candlestick

here when I came out of Asia Minor. For 14 years I was the Masters little darling. The mistress is too. The gods were on my side, I became the head of the household. I took over from that pea brain of a master. Need I say more. He made me a co heir of his will and I inherited a millionaire's estate". Now that's not a common slave story, but that happened. Casson also describes white collar slaves, They were clerks, cashiers, bookkeepers of ancient Greece and Rome. They man not only the lower level of such work, but the upper as well. Banks were owned by wealthy Greek and Roman families, but the officers who ran the bank were often slaves. Slaves could obtain freedom since they were generous in granting manumission, that's freedom from slavery, particularly to the slaves who worked in their houses and homes. The white collar slave worker could be fairly sure of eventually gaining it. And what about women? Casson writes, There were numerous female slaves in any large household, serving as maids, hairdressers, misuses, seamstresses, nurses and the like. Many earn their freedom. How did one become a slave at this time? Snodgrass says, People became slaves through birth, parental selling or abandonment, captivity and war, inability to pay debts and voluntary attempts to better one's condition.

Race was not a factor. The history of Roman slavery while for many slaves, life was harsh and cruel. Their circumstances depended on their owners. And so you got to take that into account. As I read this, I read two totally different perspectives. As I read John MacArthur, he gives a very sobering view of how cruel slave owners could be. And there were a number of them and that dependent on who you were and that was fairly common. And here's some of those examples. MacArthur says, In both Greek and Roman cultures, most slaves had no legal rights and were treated as commercial commodities. Roman citizens came to look on work as beneath their dignity, and the entire empire gradually came to function largely by slave power. Slaves were bought and sold, traded, and used and discarded as heartlessly as if they were animals or tools. Consider masters like Pliny the Elder, who was deeply grieved over the death of some of his slaves, these masters were exceptional. One Roman writer divided agricultural instruments into three classes: the articulate-who were slaves, the inarticulate-which were animals, and the mute-which were the tools and vehicles. The slaves only distinction above animals then was that he could speak. The Roman statesman Cato said, Old slaves were to be thrown on a dump. And when a slave is ill, do not feed him anything. It's not worth your money. Augustus crucified a slave for accidentally killing his pet quail. And a man named Pollio threw a slave into a pond of deadly lamprey eels for breaking a crystal goblet. Juvenal wrote of a slave owner, whose greatest pleasure was listening to this sweet song of his slaves being flogged. So there was abject cruelty, and it was not uncommon. MacArthur also says this, Although Scripture does not speak against slavery as such, it clearly speaks against the kidnapping of anyone for the purpose of making him a slave, which we noticed already in Exodus 21:16. European and American slave trade lasted past the middle of the 19th century, and was therefore in clear violation of Scripture despite rationalizations for many Christians who were involved in it. Most of them even used scripture to justify this wicked practice.

Certain types of non abusive and beneficial slavery were permitted or even advocated in the Old Testament. So we read about slavery and the guidelines, as we have already mentioned, and let me just expand that a little bit. A thief who could not make

restitution could be indentured until repayment was worked out. A plan, far superior to the modern prison sentence, which provides for no restitution of property or money to the victim, or restoration of dignity for the thief. So did you catch that? What we do in modern culture, we put a thief in jail. The person who was stolen from never gets anything back. But in Paul's day, you would work for them until you paid them back, and there would be dignity to the thief because he had repaid the debt. That can't happen the way it is today. It was a superior system. Israelites were allowed to buy slaves from the pagan nations around them, Leviticus 25:44. But fellow Israelites could not be bought or sold, although they could voluntarily indenture themselves. During their time of service, they were to be treated as hired workers not as slaves. Even pagan slaves were not to be abused. A fellow Israelites could not be used as a slave for more than six years. And at the end of that time, he was to be given liberal provisions as a form of severance pay, Exodus 21:2. And every 50th year, what would happen? Jubilee. Jubilee freed all slaves, returning them back to their families, Leviticus 25:10. A slave who loved his master and preferred to remain with him could voluntarily indenture himself for life by having this done, do you know what it was? He pierced his ear with an awl. And that was to show that he voluntarily was going to stick with this master. That's the Exodus 21:5-6.

Since slavery is wrong, why doesn't Paul come right out and condemn it at the time when Paul writes this? I don't know the exact answer to this. But certainly, Christianity isn't the dominating world force at this time when he writes, it's rather insignificant in the Roman culture. It was against the law to be a Christian. So even though Paul doesn't come out and say no to slavery, his teaching in this passage undermines slavery. The basic teaching of Christianity undermines slavery. For example, the great commandment which says we're to love God, and love other people. Now, let's see, with slavery, how is that a problem? Are you really loving the other person? It says, love your neighbor as yourself, not own your neighbor. Luke 10:27 doesn't say anything about owning your neighbor. The Golden Rule about treating others as you would want to be treated, we would not want to be ripped from our homes and transported somewhere against our will to be abused by someone. So neither slavery or masters are ever viewed positively in Scripture. Israel was in awful bondage in Egypt and God delivered them. We're told over and over again, there was celebration because God delivered them from their oppression in Egypt. He set them free.

So how did Paul undermine slavery? Let's take a look. First, if you look back in chapter five verse one, we talked about this a little bit last week, pastor and I. The backdrop of all these different relationships...husband and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters...chapter five verse one says, "Be imitators of God", be like him. So what's God like? Psalm 68:5, a father of the fatherless, a champion of widows. He is a God of justice and compassion, Psalm 146:9. He stands against oppressors and cares for the vulnerable. It's quite the opposite of slavery isn't it. The Christ Centered Commentary says here in Ephesians, Paul plants the seeds of the destruction of slavery, beginning with the Christian community. Paul focused on spreading the gospel in a society that approved a slavery and in so doing, he was taking it down. Stott says, The gospel immediately began in the first century to undermine the institution, it lit a fuse which at long last led to the explosion which destroyed it.

So let's read Ephesians 6:5-9, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is slave or free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him." Now, as we read through this, there's a recurring theme that happens in each verse. There's a focus. We'll call it a Christ focus. The word Christ, Lord and Master is in every verse that we read. So he calls them to something that's a step above The Golden Rule, treat others as you would want to be treated. Instead, he says, You should treat them as you would Christ, verse five. Notice in verse nine, masters are to treat their slaves in the same way. The masters were under all the same obligations that the slaves were under, mentioned in these first four verses. They were to treat their slaves with respect, fear, with sincerity of heart, because you're under a master in heaven. These changes alone should have abolished slavery for Christians. Paul reminds both slave and master that they're under the Lordship of Christ, that there's no favoritism with him, verse nine, all equal. Paul does not quote the Mosaic Law, he could have. He could have gone back to Exodus chapter 23 through 24, you'll find laws pertaining to masters and slaves, but he doesn't go there. He goes here instead, he constantly comes back to Christ, to remind them. Let me ask you, if both are living, both the slave and the master, under the watchful eye of Christ, how would that change the work ethic of slaves? Would it be different? Or the treatment given by masters? It should change everything for them right, how they view this. They both were to live and be aware that Christ is the ultimate master and judge and with him there is no partiality, equal footing of all.

Slaves have no standing under Roman Law, they were property. But Paul says, Masters, treat your slaves in the same way without threatening them. Not only does he take out physical abuse and verbal abuse, but don't threaten, you're to treat them with kindness and respect as you would if it were Jesus. As for slaves and servants, while they were to obey their masters, and that term is absolute obedience, the only exception was if they were asked to do something dishonest or immoral. So they were to obey as they would obey Christ, their ultimate boss. So there's a transfer in the mind of the slave, you know, this job that's so difficult and under an abusive master, uncaring master. They can shift their allegiance from him to Christ. There's a transfer that goes on in their mind. It's useful, you know, and it's not only useful then but it's useful now, isn't it? We're going to talk more about work today. But for us, it's hard sometimes to view your boss positively, or respect them in certain circumstances, but as Christians we are able to transfer that to Jesus and to work as you would work for him. Paul told one slave in Corinth, you're the Lord's freedman, even though still a slave, you have the highest calling, serving Jesus. This frees us and the the slave, from the everyday grind. No work is merely work. There's no sacred and secular. All of us are called to a particular job, to work for Christ. No matter where we're at, no matter what work we do. And work is a gift from God. We should be thankful for. Are you thankful for the work that you have?

You know, there are some yucky jobs though, aren't there, pretty disgusting. We've watched a show called Dirty Jobs. Have you seen that? He does some pretty despicable

things sometimes. And he works hard. He tries to work hard at whatever he does, it seems like, to do a good job. You know, I worked in a grocery store and the worst job there was emptying the grease trap in the meat department. And that stuff that ran into the floor and sat there for a month and then this rancid old yucky grease, it was pretty bad. Maybe you have to clean a dog kennel or muck out a horse stall. You know those are pretty bad jobs. What's your least favorite job? Do you have one? Work of every kind. It's a blessing from God. We need to see Jesus as our ultimate boss. The principles of our passage apply in awful working conditions. Certainly most slaves had way worse working conditions than what we experience, even on our hard days. How much more should we seek to live these out where we are, at our work...But my job sometimes is just hard. It's difficult. My boss is unfair...some of you could say that your boss is unfair, and he's a tyrant. He's hard. I've had some difficult ones. Maybe they are a tyrant, but you're not physically threatened or abused or treated like property. Remember your boss is Jesus. Verse five, slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling. MacArthur says this, The believers attitude and obeying his employer is not one of fear and trembling. The idea is not that of cowering, fright and fear, but one of honor and respect, that make a person anxious to please. If he cannot honor and respect his employer for the employer's own sake, he respects him for the Lord's sake, as one under whom he is to submit. Although men terribly abuse it, meaning they abused this right of authority, the principle of authority and submission is God-given and is always to be honored. That's true in these relationships that we've seen...husband and wife, parents and children, and in this relationship. It's a principle that goes through all. It's to be honored.

God places bosses in their position of authority, with sincerity heart it says, verse five. We're to serve with singleness of heart, an undivided mind with integrity and uprightness, not hypocritical or superficial. But it would be easy, as an abused slave or a mistreated employee, to harbor hatred or to be dishonest or get angry, be lazy towards an abusive boss or master. Paul calls them to put this off, be genuine and thorough, compassionate towards this boss. Paul told the Thessalonian believers to excel still more and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business. And work with your hands just that we commanded you, 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12. That's pretty different than a lot of work environments I've been in, people that are quiet, doing their own job, not complaining. Do you see that sometimes that gets violated. We even tend to do that sometimes. We should not be bragging, not criticizing the work of others, or in any way being disruptive. See, verse five, the last part, it's as if he, the boss, is Christ. There's the transfer we talked about earlier, no matter how despicable your boss is, you are instead serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses six and seven, "not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not the man". Like MacArthur says, When the Spirit filled believers...and we noticed when we were talking about husbands and wives, talking about parents and children, we were talking about the filling of the Holy Spirit. And here it is again...spirit filled believers sincerely obedient to their employers as to Christ not man pleasers, not just when your eye is on them. He does not need to be checked up on because he always works to the best of his ability, whether or not anyone else is around. And he works just

as hard when he's passed over for a raise or a promotion. He does not do a good job to make a good impression on other people, as do men-pleasers, or to promote his own welfare. If he gains those things, they're incidental to his primary motive and his intention. He works diligently because to do so is the will of God and is the sincere desire of his own heart. With good will, he or she expresses the attitude of the worker who does not need prompting or compelling. When a Christian is where God wants him to be, and is obedient to render services as to the Lord, that is the most challenging, productive and rewarding place to be. Every day should be a day of service to the Lord. Whatever your hand finds to do, Solomon tells us, do it with all your might, Ecclesiastes 9:10. In Colossians 3:23 he says, Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. That's the work attitude of the spirit filled Christian, just as in the other relationships we mentioned. Even at your work, especially at your work, you give a testimony to Christ as you work. Now it says, we are servants. Where do we get the best example of a servant in scripture? Jesus is the premier example. Lord Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve and gave his life as a ransom for many, Mark 10:45. And it was he, who emptied himself as he took on the form of a servant, and humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Verse eight, "knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is slave or free". So good things that we do, where do they come from? Well Paul says in Romans 7:18, In my flesh there is no good thing. So can I generate good from inside of me? No, it's got to be God, it's got to be Spirit-driven. Whatever good, it comes from him, from God. Good that's accomplish through us is by his indwelling Spirit, if we obey, we can look forward to a reward. When I think about rewards, I often think of a passage in Revelation. And I think it's helpful for me, because it's not from me but it's from God, Revelation 4:10-11, the 24 elders fall down before the throne of God and cast their crowns before his throne and say, You are worthy, Oh Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things. And by your will, they were created and have their being. He not only created it, He willed it to happen, and sustained it by his power, his strength, all of it is from him. So Paul is encouraging slaves/employees. If you think of most slaves, some of them that we talked about had money, but most did not. Most were pretty poor. And for them, instead of focusing on that, they could focus on a reward that's sure, a reward that sure to come. God is going to reward them for the good they do. So don't lose heart. What an incredible blessing that is. Calvin says this, There's no distinction between a slave and a free man. The world wants us to set little value on the labor of slaves, but God esteems them as highly as the work of kings. MacArthur says, An employer may not appreciate or even be aware of the good work done, perhaps because he's indifferent or because someone else takes credit for what was done. But God knows and God rewards, he sees in the workplace. No good thing done in his name and for His glory can pass his notice, or fail to receive his blessing. It's not going to go unnoticed in God's economy.

Verse nine, "Masters, do the same to them". All that is required of a slave is required from you by your master in heaven. Stop threatening, no violence, no yelling, no disrespect or abuse because there is no partiality with him. God plays no favorites, all of us are equal at the foot of the cross. No matter who we are. MacArthur wrote, A Christian employer's first work is to do God's will. And a manifest Christ's likeness in all

he does. He makes business decisions, first of all, on the basis of God's standards of righteousness, truth and honesty. Seeking to manifest the nature and will of his Heavenly Father in everything he does, he deals with them fairly. Because that is his Lord's will. He treats employees with respect, because to do so is to respect and honor the Lord. The Spirit filled employer is careful to give up threatening, the Greek word for threatening is loosening up or releasing. He uses authority and power as little as possible and does not throw his weight around or lorded over those under him. He is never abusive or inconsiderate. He realizes that his own authority though God given is temporary. He knows that he and his workers alike, are under the supreme authority of God, that their Master and his is not on earth but in heaven. The employer knows that he is a fellow servant of Jesus Christ with his employees and that he is accountable to the same Master. Calvin said, God is no respecter of persons, king or slave, it doesn't matter what color or ethnic background. As we said, we're all equal at the foot of the cross. The most important thing in this life is not whether you work in a sawmill or an office building in a nice part of town, what matters is how you respond to Jesus Christ. Is he your Master, your boss? Jesus said it like this, "For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life?", Mark 8:36.

If you know Christ, then you are rich, no matter if you're dirt poor slave. Because of this, one can say with Paul, "As having nothing yet possessing everything", 2 Corinthians 6:10. The person who has Jesus and nothing has no less than the person who has Jesus and everything else. You belong to Jesus Christ, and you have everything. If you do not have Christ, then you need to receive the one, who through being the ultimate master became the ultimate servant, dying for sinners like us. Jesus came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, to free us from slavery to sin and bring us into loving relationship with the Father. He came to give us what we cannot earn, spiritual life. He came to make us what we cannot become, no longer slaves but sons. He is the obedient servant, the best Master and the Sovereign Lord, look to Him and live, look to Him and live! If you need help, come speak to us.

I'll close with this story. An elderly missionary couple, who were returning home on a ship after many years of sacrificial service in Africa. On the same ship was Theodore Roosevelt, who had just completed a highly successful big game hunt. And as the ship docked in New York Harbor, thousands of well-wishers and dozens of reporters lined the pier to welcome Roosevelt home. But not a single person was there to welcome the missionaries. As the couple drove to the hotel, the man complained to his wife, It just doesn't seem right! We gave 40 years of our lives to Jesus Christ to win souls in Africa, nobody cares when we return. Yet the President goes over there for a few weeks and kill some animals, and the whole world takes notice. But as they prayed together that night, before retiring, the Lord seemed to say to them, Do you know why you haven't received your reward yet my children? It's because you're not yet home. See Christ as your boss, let him reign in you. Let's take a moment and pray.

Lord, we thank You that You give us work, that it's good. We know it's difficult at times, we know that there are abuses. We pray that you'd help us to look to you ultimately as our boss, to work hard, and when we're over others, to be respectful and kind. We thank you for grace and mercy that comes through Jesus, we thank you, that your son is the

ultimate example for us. Help us to follow him, as he was willing to be a servant and even go to the cross for us. We thank you for Jesus, in His name, amen.

