

Gospel Slaves

Long Beach Alliance Church • October 18, 2015 • Pastor Chris Lankford

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

~Ephesians 6:5 (NIV)

1) **Bondservants, Servants, and Slaves**

- A) Following a familiar “household code” style (wives/husbands, Ephesians 5:22-33; children/parents, 6:1-4), Paul instructs the Ephesian church regarding slaves and masters (6:5-9). Because the words Paul uses can cause distraction for modern readers, it can be easy to miss a radical counter-culture Gospel ethic!
- B) For each aspect of the Christian household (marriage, parenting, and economics) the central reason to do “the will of God” (6:6-7) is a whole-life submission (from 5:18-21) to Jesus Christ and the timeless purposes of the Gospel. In Christian households, the Gospel is revealed when it is lived in sacrificial community!
- C) The relationship between slave and master was a foundational economic aspect of society in the Ancient Near East (Old Testament) and Roman Empire (New Testament). The primary concern of this section (6:5-9) is focused on behavior within typical economic relationships which were experiencing confusion because of the unity, equality, and impartiality of Christianity (6:9, also Galatians 3:28).

2) **Mankind in Slavery and Slavery in Mankind**

- A) From the moment mankind sinned against God (Genesis 3:6-7), all of mankind entered into slavery. Slavery was/is a self-chosen state of every man and woman, a natural result of living in self-directed sinfulness (Romans 6:16-19). The spiritual slavery of mankind is reflected in physical slavery in human relationships, but has never been meant to be the natural relationship between human beings (note Exodus 21:16).
- B) Despite this, mankind has enslaved his fellow man since earliest recorded history. The slavery represented in the Bible is almost always different than the European and American slave practices of the 17th–19th centuries, and remains radically different than modern-day slavery. Biblical guidelines for masters and slaves (Exodus 21, Ephesians 6:5-9) are always meant for economic reasons, always meant to deliver freedom for a person.
- C) Unlike the history of any other nation, Israel’s history is of a nation freed from slavery because of God’s mighty power (Genesis 15:13-14; Exodus 6:6-7, 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 5:15). One of the central paradigms of salvation in Scripture is that of the slave being freed (Galatians 5:1) which actively leads to extending freedom, equality, and impartiality to everyone (note Galatians 5:13-15; Ephesians 6:9).
- D) Unfortunately, because the Bible has no overt “abolitionist” statement (similar to polygamy), church leaders in America used their significant influence (e.g. James Henley Thornwell, Robert Dabney) to support the slave trade. This resulted in terrible atrocities, rejecting the personhood and dignity of black people, reducing families to owned assets, and the labor of each slave as owned by the slave master.
- E) The legacy of slavery and the “lynching culture” which followed the Civil War era (over 3,500 black lynchings between 1875-1950) have left painful scars in America and haunting questions for the church. While it is most appropriate for modern Christians to apply Ephesians 6:5-9 to vocational issues, we should not do so with too much ease. Because of our modern context, our Gospel ambassadorship (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) is crucial.
- F) In every aspect of the Christian household, there is a critical central ethic. We are servants of Christ first, servants of His purposes. In service to Christ we serve those in our own families. We do not live for ourselves. We live so the Gospel might be known through our church, in our families, and in the world!

Growth Group Guide Week 7: Ephesians 6:5-9

Opener

Has there ever been a time in which you tried to make yourself feel a certain way or want to do something? Were you able to do it?

Bible Study

Read through Ephesians 6:5-9

1. Bondservants, _____ your earthly masters with _____ and _____, with a _____ heart, as you would _____. (5:5)
2. Bondservants should obey, not by the way of _____, as _____, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the _____. (6:6)
3. To whom should service be directed? (6:7)
4. What does a person receive back from the Lord? (6:8)
5. How should masters treat their servants, and why? (6:9)

Read through 1 Peter 1:13-25

1. What should we set our hope fully on? (1:13)
2. How does God judge, and how are we to conduct ourselves? (1:17)
3. Jesus was foreknown before the _____, but was made manifest for you, who _____ Him are _____ in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him _____. (1:20-21)
4. How are we to love each other? (1:22)

Discussion

1. What do you learn about God through the sermon or the texts (on the left)? Is there anything you disagree with? What stands out to you the most from the sermon or texts as you try to live out your faith?
2. Do you find it more difficult to be submissive or obedient to authorities in your life, or do you find it more difficult to do it from a sincere heart? What does it mean to do things from a sincere heart as to the Lord? How do you accomplish that?
3. CS Lewis wrote:
As practical imperatives for here and now the two great commandments have to be translated, "Behave as if you loved God and man." For no man can love because he is told to. Yet obedience on this practical level is not really obedience at all. And if a man really loved God and man, once again this would hardly be obedience; for if he did, he would be unable to help it. Thus the command really says to us, "Ye must be born again."
Are you able to love from your heart out of obedience? Can you love God or others in your own power? What do you think the Holy Spirit does in your heart?

Making Room to Make Disciples

Your next challenge is to walk your street, observing and praying about the people who live around you. What do you think about that? Do you feel like you know your neighbors? Why or why not? Why do you think God wants you to live there?