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But Rather Serve Them

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Series: I Timothy

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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But Rather Serve Them

Father, we bow before You, and ask once again as we approach this very difficult subject, that Your sweet Spirit would anoint us and give us both power and peace; that You would apply this message to each of our lives in the area in which it needs to be applied, and that only Jesus would receive honor, praise and glory.

We thank You, our Father, for the privilege of meeting together to gather around Your Word, and for the awesome privilege of prayer; that we can simply call that matchless name of Jesus and the courts of heaven are silenced and You listen to our prayer. Amen.

There was nothing more humiliating. There was nothing more demeaning. There was nothing more hopeless than being a slave. You were nobody. You owned nothing. You had no rights. Your decisions were made for you. Your life was a piece of clay in the hands of another, often seeing you as a worthless tool to use for his own good. If you chose to run away and were caught, one of two fates awaited you. Either you would be executed, or you would be have the letter “f” branded on your forehead. It stood for *fugitivus* or “runaway”. Of such little value were you, that should any harm come to your master, the authorities could come and execute all of his slaves without so much as a trial.

During the Roman empire, it is estimated that nearly half the total population were slaves. Some wealthy Romans possessed as many as 20,000 slaves at one time. Under Roman law, a slave was expendable. A master could have a slave crucified for any reason at all. Augustus Caesar had 30,000 slaves crucified during his reign alone. It is no wonder then that slaves would find themselves filled with bitter hatred for their masters. They often saw themselves as animals caged by a ruthless trainer, used as beasts, and discarded at will.

But Rather Serve Them

Now I'm going to ask you this morning to fine tune the your mind and your heart to that time in history and to that set of circumstances.

Imagine, if you will, that *you* are one of those slaves. You have recently become a Christian, and your prayer is that God will deliver you from this oppression. Your owner is cruel, unjust, and a ruthless taskmaster. You are surrounded by other slaves who are filled with anger and hatred and the dream of revenge. They spend almost as much time cursing the master and trying to avoid work as they do at the jobs they are assigned. They are filled with bitterness and evil intent, and yet they see no way out.

Now visualize that one day you come meet some friends of yours that are also slaves. Perhaps you meet them at a worship service and these slaves run up and grab you saying, "Guess what? My master just became a Christian." And you reply, "Oh, how fortunate, that means you'll be set free." Then you see them several weeks later and ask, "Are you free?" They answered, "You won't believe it. My master is now a Christian and you can see his life changing. But when we approached him, he said, 'Absolutely not, a slave is a slave.' Can you believe it?" And they are confused! Their argument is why should they be enslaved by a brother? The whole church is a buzz and arguing and there's an uproar. Some of them stand up at the church meetings saying that we must do whatever is necessary to free those who are in bondage, even if it means breaking the law. Others are demanding that the church call in these Christian masters and order them to free their slaves.

Well, that's the scenario when you're a slave during this time in history.

Again you're gathered together at the evening service in the Ephesian church, and young Timothy stands and reads to the congregation a letter from the Apostle Paul, dealing with a variety of issues including widows, elders, deacons, and doctrine. Suddenly, Timothy reads these words:

Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.

But Rather Serve Them

And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

(I Timothy 6:1,2 NKJV)

I think you can sense the silence. I think you can all but feel the tension in the air. “Read that again, Timothy,” you plead in your heart, “surely I didn’t hear it right.” But the look on all your fellow slaves’ faces tells you that you heard it right. Paul is telling you to *honor* your master? Paul is telling your friends who are under bondage to Christian slave owners not to despise them but to *love them and serve them* because they *are your brothers*? Chills run down your spine. Principles pour from the Word of God to every child of God who hears this passage in our generation as well, principles that did not die when the evils of slavery found their way to the history books and men were free at last.

Once again we find ourselves looking at a very difficult subject and finding that God’s perspective is diametrically opposed to ours. In fact, *if ever the natural mind would find cause to object to the mind of Christ, it would be here*. Our title for today’s study is “But Rather Serve Them.”

- I- The Issue of Honor
- II- The Issue of Slavery
- III- The Task of The Slave
- IV- The Ultimate Humiliation
- V- The Ultimate Objective

Perhaps you cannot adequately relate to the problems facing a slave in the first century. Then try to apply these principles as we study them to your individual situation where you work, in the home, in relationship to the government, or to the church, *or any other authority under which God has placed you*. The issue wasn’t slavery. Slavery was the canvas upon which the portrait was painted because it was a real problem at that time. The issue was the response of the Christian to unjust authority, unjust laws, and unjust circumstances. Now the word “unjust” must be understood at the outset. There is no such thing as “unjust” authority or “unfair” circumstances.

But Rather Serve Them

We are sinners and that sin has earned us nothing but death. We were destined to a life of utter despair and eternal suffering until Jesus Christ came and paid the price for our sins and set us free from the bondage in which we found ourselves. We didn't deserve it. "It was not by works of righteousness which we have done." "For by grace were we saved, and that not of ourselves, it was a gift from God, *not of works*, lest any man should boast."

So all we deserve is an eternal hell. Anything we get other than that is grace. If you cannot grasp that, you will not fully grasp the awesomeness of God's love, and you will *never* be content in this life. Every breath we breathe is of grace. We do not *deserve* life apart from God's mercy. And we certainly do not deserve a better life than the worst life any man or woman on earth enjoys. That is the rub. By becoming believers we have been endowed with an eternal inheritance; an endless life of joy in the very presence of God Himself; the eventual eradication of pain, suffering, death, and sorrow. It's a guaranteed, ironclad promise. But that comes when Jesus comes. Until then, we have His Spirit implanted in us to give His mind and His power to live in a world in which, *if we are walking in the Spirit*, we are guaranteed suffering, persecution, tribulation, and distress. "In this world ye shall have tribulation." It, too, is a promise. Count on it. And every time it comes, thank God that His Word is true; that if He was 100% accurate on that prophecy, He will be 100% accurate on His promises of the joy that is to come.

THE ISSUE OF HONOR

With that in mind, we approach Paul's explanation of the believer under authority, *especially as it applies to his job and to the law*, with a clear understanding that the kingdom we are living for is not this one; therefore, the choices we make will always be predicated on one question: "What choice will most glorify God and demonstrate His character?" Never is the issue "what will bring us the most happiness" or "what will guarantee our rights". The only right we have is the right to submit to the will of the Living God. Anything that brings us that which is pleasant is a *privilege*. But being a believer does not guarantee you prosperity, success, or physical well-

But Rather Serve Them

being. When you have it, be thankful. When you don't, do not become bitter or resentful. It did not even guarantee a slave his freedom. In fact, his freedom was not the issue. His witness was the issue.

And so once again, Paul begins by reminding the believer of the principle of honor. And once again, it is not in harmony with the natural mind. He is telling these Ephesians to *actually honor... that is respect and show deference to those slave owners who were using them unjustly like animals, depriving them of their rights to the very basic things in life.* They were not to tolerate them until they could figure a way to escape. They were to honor them. You say, "But they are not deserving of honor". True. But remember God's principles of honor? 1) He is sovereign. He has the right to honor *whoever He chooses.* 2) He often chooses to honor those we would not honor to demonstrate the majesty of His ways. 3) It is His nature to have us honor the office in many cases, in spite of the unworthiness of the one holding that office.

You ask: What in the world could be gained by honoring a mean, cruel, unjust taskmaster who is treating men like beasts? Answer: It will be the very opposite of what the natural man would do. In thus doing, no one but God can be glorified. And *as He is being glorified,* that slave-owner, his family, his friends, the other slaves, and the people who simply look on from the outside will see something they have never seen: *God living in a man.*

The word "yoke" used in verse one is a word signifying one who is "tied together with another". It is a word used in Scripture to illustrate the necessity for two people who are pulling together in the same yoke to be of one mind. It is also the word used to describe being one with Christ in Matthew 11:28. We read, "his yoke is easy" (it fits perfectly). But one who is "unequally yoked together with an unbeliever" is headed for sure disaster because two people are harnessed together and their ultimate destination is not the same. Here the phrase "under the yoke" is used, indicating that the one who is tied to the harness is not in the lead. He is yoked, but must follow wherever the one he is yoked to leads him. Vincent says that this phrase in the Greek portrays a "hard and

disagreeable condition”. In other words, Paul is asking those who are slaves to miserable, difficult taskmasters to “honor” or “lift above with respect” the very ones who are making their lives so unlivable, who have taken from them their respect, their privileges, their freedom. Honor them.

THE ISSUE OF SLAVERY

It would have been difficult enough to heed this commandment had slavery itself been palatable. But the very concept of men owning men was so contrary to the dignity of man that it would appear that one of the first duties of the early church would have been to stamp it out. And if they could not destroy it from Roman rule, at least make it impossible for believers to own slaves and, in particular, for believers to own believing slaves. It was the social issue of the first century. Hence, it is easy to grasp how a believer should relate to unfair or unfavorable or unjust laws from this issue as well.

The church was not only *not given* a mandate to abolish slavery at this time; it was given a series of steps through which compliance would be without conflict. This is a difficult thing to grasp. And while we cannot apply it to every situation, we can realize that, in general, God’s concern is not in reforming society, but regenerating man. Christ’s objective in coming to earth was not to free the Jew but to save the lost, first the Jew, then the Gentile. Whatever conclusions you draw from this passage, you must realize that it clearly portrays the order of priorities in the believer’s life and, at least, gives some indicators of the believer’s response to civil disobedience. The Christian’s testimony of *who God is* and *how God looks in a man* was His first concern. “For what would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” What if all the slaves in the world were freed, and none were saved? What if none of the slaves in the world were freed, and *one* was saved? Jesus came to *seek and to save that which was lost*. He placed the church here for the *very same purpose*.

That does not mean that the church ignores moral wrongs. God forbid. Nor does it mean that we refuse to participate in the process of change. That would be contrary to our role as salt and light. But *we must never lose sight of our real purpose*

But Rather Serve Them

as we do. Our real objectives are spiritual, and how we conduct ourselves under authority, even as we move towards change, is of primary importance to God. We are to honor those in authority over us, even if they invoke laws that are not just, or even if they are unfair and unjust in applying the laws that exist. The flesh can't stand that. We want to fight. We want to resist. But God says, "No."

THE TASK OF THE SLAVE

What then was to be the task of the slaves? And what, then, is to be the role of the employees in our society who are under authority that is unjust, or unfair, or unresponsive? They were to *"count their own masters worthy of all honor"*. The word "count" is a word that means "a conscious, sure judgment made after a careful weighing of the facts". In other words, they weren't acting out of ignorance or out of blind presumption, but out of clear choice. Having weighed God's perspective of the matter, being fully aware of how difficult and unfair their lot in life, they were to choose to honor the ones who were the source of their grief and pain. Why? *"so that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed."*

There is the only reason you need for suffering unjust punishment. It glorifies God. Let's verify that fact, and compile all of the principles of working under authority by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

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

Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,

because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

(Ephesians 6:5-8 NIV)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

But Rather Serve Them

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,

since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:22-24)

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them,

and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. (Titus 2:9-11 NIV)

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (I Peter 2:18-21 NIV)

The whole thing then boils down to this: respect or “honor” equals obedience. Obedience involves the following:

1- Utter, genuine sincerity (we must mean it). (Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22)

2- The same level of intensity when no one is looking as when the boss is in the room. He is. (Colossians 3:22)

3- Viewing whatever you do on the job as done to Christ. (Ephesians 6:7, Colossians 3:23)

4- Expect rewards in heaven, *not on earth*. (Ephesians 6:8, Colossians 3:24)

5- Trying to please those over us. (Titus 2:9)

6- Not talking back unsubmitively. (Titus 2:9)

7- Not stealing time, money, supplies, clients or loyalty. (Titus 2:10)

But Rather Serve Them

8- Never demonstrating a spirit that generates distrust. (Titus 2:10).

Furthermore,

9- It is not related to the boss' kindness (I Peter 2:18)

10- It doesn't matter whether or not we deserve the criticism (I Peter 2:19).

11- *The more undeserving we are of the injustices we receive*, the more grace we receive and the more glory God receives (I Peter 2:19-21), (which is the reason God is allowing it in the first place).

Therefore, our behavior under authority, *particularly unjust authority*, is not a battle between us and the boss or us and the government or us and parents or wives and husbands, but it is a battle between Satan and God. We happen to be the battlefield. and the goal is not to get our way. The goal is to demonstrate the remarkable difference between the mind of the world and the mind of God, keeping in mind that we *may well never see the results in this life*. The promises are that *in heaven*, we shall receive our reward. And remember, we don't receive it both places...so rewards deferred are rewards guaranteed.

Now this is key. When people say to you I did it God's way and nothing happened that is nonsense. You did it God's way and something happened in heaven. The living God took the reward, the treasure you laid up and stored it in the vault for you to have for all eternity to have as a crown to cast at His feet. What do you mean nothing happened? When you say nothing happened then you are saying God's a liar. You may say, "Well, I didn't see anything happen. Okay that is different. But what happened in the Spirit kingdom you cannot see.

If you are an employee and your supervisor or manager is unfair, insensitive, and even harsh or cruel, you are right where God can manifest Himself supernaturally, and thus see people come to Christ. If you are in a difficult marriage and the one you are to respond to is overbearing, unfair, and immature, you are on a battlefield where Satan and God are engaged in a contest of eternal consequence and *your right response to wrong situations will make all the difference*. If

But Rather Serve Them

you are facing or fighting unjust laws and are under an unjust system, *how you respond in godliness is even more important to God than whether or not the law is changed*. If you succeed there and lose your testimony, you have won the battle, but lost the war. That is Paul's disturbing message to Timothy; and it has our name on the envelope.

THE ULTIMATE HUMILIATION

Now Paul proceeds to verse two and describes the ultimate humiliation. He answers the questions those friends of yours have been asking who work for believing masters (or bosses). Here are his words:

And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

(I Timothy 6:2 NKJV)

It was as though Paul read our mail. It was as though *he had been there*. His letter to Philemon about Onesimus is a treatise on the subject from the owner's perspective. And Scripture makes no excuses for the employer or one in authority who does not rule with a gracious heart. But the issue here is how the one *under* authority should behave. And once more, the ultimate humiliation comes to light.

Just suppose you are a slave whose master has become a believer. What are your rights? What is the church's position? How long should you stay a slave without rebelling or demanding your freedom? And what if (as some commentators describe the actual situations) a pastor or elder of your flock is a slave who actually works for one of the parishioners? Should he not demand his liberty?

Paul says liberty is not the issue. The reputation of Christ is the issue. The believer who is placed under a believing authority has no right to expect preferential treatment. He or she has no right to judge the behavior of his or her boss. That is God's job. So long as he or she is under that authority they are not only to honor that believing one over them, they are not to "despise" them or resent them, but rather serve them. And there is where our study gets its title.

But Rather Serve Them

...but rather serve them. There is your mandate. Humble yourself the way Jesus did when he laid aside His rights as God and came to place Himself under this world system for a season in order to demonstrate the awesome power of God that issues forth when His children submit to His sovereignty. You say, “But what right do those believing slave owners have to keep slaves?” They have the right of the laws of that day. No, the laws were wrong, and in God’s timing He saw that the salt of God’s people eroded the injustices of it all. But for the moment, it was acceptable under the laws of the land, and therefore the believer’s responsibility was not to judge the law, but to judge his heart. He had been called by God not only *not to despise his boss*, but rather, to serve him, to give his very life if need be to show him that the Mind of Christ personified was one of submission and servitude, even in the midst of unjust and unfair authorities. That is because God’s prime concern is not justice on earth but judgment in heaven. His one main objective is the salvation of the lost and the growth of the saved, and the injustices of this earth are His very tools to accomplish those goals.

THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE

There you have the ultimate objective of it all and, in fact, the ultimate objective of the Christian life. There is a reason God allows His children to suffer (even as He did Job, and even as He did Christ, and even as He did Paul and even as He did John). Let’s read it one more time:

so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be
blasphemed. (I Timothy 6:1b NKJV)

The word “blasphemed” means literally “to be spoken of reproachfully, to be reviled or ridiculed”. When God’s child behaves like *everyone else*, the world *blasphemes the Name of God*. They scorn. They laugh. They ridicule. They say, “What’s so different about Joe? What’s so different about Mary? Sure, they carry their Bible to work, and sure they have bumper stickers that say, ‘Honk if you love Jesus’; but when the boss jumps on them, they react *just like we do*.” Or they may say, “What’s so different about her? When her husband was unfaithful or cruel or unfair, she left him just like anyone else would.” Or “Sure they’re Christians, and sure they believe in

But Rather Serve Them

what they're doing, but they are fighting the law just like us. And don't they say 'the powers that be are ordained of God?' Or is their God sovereign only up to a point?"

In order that the name of God be not blasphemed, you are to serve them. Honor them. Submit to them. Show respect for them.

Reason 1- is that the testimony of God is at stake.

Reason 2- is found in Ephesians 6. It says,

Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, (Ephesians 6:6,7 NIV)

Colossians 3:24 adds,

since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (NIV)

So the second reason you honor unjust authority and submit is because you aren't serving them; but rather as you serve them you serve God, and God will ultimately be the one who will reward you.

Reason 3- is found in I Peter 2. It says

But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (I Peter 2:20b,21 NIV)

Do what deserves acclaim and receive punishment instead, and God will commend you because you are living out on planet earth the very quality of life Christ demonstrated when He was "reviled, but He reviled not in return, but submitted Himself to the One who judges righteously."

Go back into that tough work situation or that tough marriage or that tough battle or whatever other authorities God gave you to serve under and do not despise those who treat you so unfairly...but rather serve them. You heard God...serve them. Give your life to making *them* successful. God's Name

But Rather Serve Them

will be honored, you will be storing up treasures in heaven, and God will commend you for letting Christ do once more on earth what He did on earth the first time, suffer wrongfully for the sake of winning the lost.

Serve them. Be the very best, the most humble, the most faithful, the most consistent, the most honest, the most responsive employee or wife or student or child or citizen you can be. And with Christ in you, you can be the very best. You can do “all things through Christ who strengthens you.”

I know. I know. Everybody else says you’re a fool. That’s a good sign. They said that of Jesus as well. Wouldn’t you rather be considered a fool for Christ’s sake than dishonor His Name? Wouldn’t you rather hear “well done, thou good and faithful one” from Him than you would from the unbelieving crowd? And the very ones who are taunting you are watching you to see if you really are that different.

You will be, if instead of resisting and rebelling and raving against those who are unjust and unfair, *you rather serve them*. You will have prevented the Name of God from being blasphemed; you will have laid up treasures for glory, and you will have demonstrated once again the nature of God. He laid aside His rights and His robes, and He came to earth to be with the very ones who scorned Him. He could have gone back to the Father and said “I’m not appreciated. They don’t deserve it.” Of course, He didn’t. He heard the Father’s Words...but rather serve them...and so He did. And so must we. Let’s pray.

Father,

We thank You and we pray for the hurting among us, those whose lives are in varying degrees of being shattered by circumstances. We pray that Your Spirit would calm us and would comfort us even as You promised us, and allow us to see that Your comfort in our lives is to equip us to comfort others.

May we see the scope and the purpose of it all in Jesus. Grant us we pray, Father, wisdom during this time and in this message.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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