

“SLAVES OF CHRIST”

Ephesians 6:5-9

What is Paul saying to the widespread phenomenon of slavery in his day? Implications for today? 1:1; Gal 3:28-29; Eph 5:18

I. SLAVERY IN PAUL’S DAY WAS NOT THE SAME AS IN LINCOLN’S DAY

A. Slavery Was a Very Complicated Phenomenon

As many as 1 in 3 in Italy or 20% across the Empire. From various nations. Debt; slave market; prisoners-of-war. Jobs: menial laborers, accountants, physicians, professors, trainers of children, potters, miners, cooks, business agents, valets, agricultural workers, and tailors.

Some were treated very well; some very poorly. Virtually no protection under the law. Masters made up their own rules. Difference from American slavery: some slaves at least theoretically could get out of slavery. For Paul to call them to account before God is a bold assertion.

B. Why No Call for Abolition?

Why doesn’t Paul call for a unilateral ending? An exceedingly complex situation. “For every complex question, there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.” Like ending all credit in the American economy overnight.

Paul’s explicit answer: external circumstances in this passing world don’t count for much. Don’t be overly concerned with them. 1 Cor 7:21-24). Freedom is preferable just like singleness is preferable (v. 26). It gives you more options to serve Christ. Philemon. Get free legally if you can. Paul is more concerned about people who are slaves of men’s opinion than those who have chains around their feet. Is Paul indifferent to the common grace virtue of liberty? No; but Phil 4:11. Paul not a

contemporary social justice warrior. We can’t do everything; we can only do the most important things. He would object to kidnapping at the very least (Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7). Ecclesiastes.

II. BOTH SIDES SHOULD RESPECT HUMAN DIGNITY AND FEAR GOD

A. Bondservants Should Focus on Christ

Paul’s counsel to the slaves is as simple as to the wives and the children. What if master is wrong or unjust? As long as they do not coerce the slave to sin, the master is to be obeyed. 1 Pet 2:18-25; Phil 2:7; Acts 5:41-42

Paul a big proponent of social order. How should we respond even to what we might believe are unjust, unwise, and unnecessary laws, regulations, etc.? Unless we are being forced to sin, we should obey them. Executive Order 152. Is anyone being forced to sin? We are not Shiphrah and Puah (Ex 1:15). Do we want Christians to earn the reputation of people who don’t respect authority? The cross to be the only “stumbling block.”

B. Masters Will Answer to Their Master in Heaven

What Frederick Douglass actually said: “I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels...”

Conclusion