



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 6: 5-9

Ephesians

“Slaves and Masters”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] But we’re continuing in Book of Ephesians in chapter 6 and we’re going to look this morning at verses 5 through 9. Paul writes, “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ, not by way of eyesight, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

That good will – with good will render service, as to the Lord, not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the time that we have to gather again this morning and to open the scriptures and to study them. To be reminded by the apostle of our duties as he deals with some of the basic areas of life: work, employment and how we are to respond to those responsibilities, those duties and how we are to live in regard to one another.

And so we ask you to bless us and through our time together may we gain further perspective on how we as Christians are to live in this world, how we are to present a witness for the saving grace of our Lord to men. We commit our time to you because it is you, Father, who opens our mind to understand these things.

It’s through the spirit that you teach us and instruct us and so I pray, Father, that our minds, our hearts would be open to receive your truth, guide us and direct us.

And in seeing the duties that you have placed upon us, may we also see your grace in all of this. It lies behind it because, Father, that is really the great motivation for what we do and how we live. And you have been gracious to us. You have brought us into this world, which is a fallen world.

And yet you have saved souls. You have sent your Son into this world to die for sinners so that all who believe in Him would have life and so we thank you, Father, for the life that we have, the many blessings that we have, the security that we have through faith alone as a gift which we have received from you.

We thank you for that, Father, and pray that that grace and that blessing would be brought to our minds as we study the text this morning and that that would become the great motivation in our lives to be diligent, faithful workers. So we pray, Father, for our spiritual needs and our spiritual condition. Bless us in that. But we also have physical needs and material needs and we look to you for that as well, Father.

We pray for those who are without work, though we study that subject this morning, there are those who are without employment and we pray that you would bless them with that, that you would open doors of opportunity. They may be able to work and make provision for their families. And in the meantime, give them encouragement, Father, and support.

We pray for the sick, we pray for those who are recovering from illness and from surgery. We pray that you would give relief and that you would give health and speedy recovery. We pray for those who are grieving because of the loss of a family member. We pray for them, Father, and pray that you would give encouragement at this time and that you would bless with the knowledge that you are faithful to your people and you care and you give relief. So we pray for them, that they would have relief from sorrow and that you would bless.

Pray for our nation, pray for our leaders. We pray for our President, the Congress, the Courts, all those whom you have placed over us, Father. We pray that you would give them great wisdom as they seek to lead this nation and that you would bless this nation. You have blessed us greatly, Father, as we consider our history, as we consider our present situation in contrast to the nations of the world and the nations of history, we see that this land of ours had been blessed above all others.

And we look to you for thanksgiving, Father, because it is you that has blessed this land. And we pray that would continue. We pray for political prosperity and

material prosperity, all of those things, Father, they are good. And yet, they can become a stumbling block. Material things can become a weight and we pray that that would not be the case, Lord.

We pray particularly for blessing of a spiritual nature and that men and women throughout this land would see their lost condition and the desperateness of that condition and by your grace that they might come to see the solution which is in the savior that you have given, Jesus Christ. As we approach the Christmas season and think of His coming into this world, may many thoughts turn to that birth and the purpose of it, to save His people from their sins.

And so, Father, we pray that many would come to know Him and that you might use us in that great blessing. And so we pray that now this morning you might teach us and prepare our hearts and instruct us that we might know better the gospel. Not only what we are to say, but how we are to live and how our testimony is to be seen in our conduct.

So bless us to that end, Father, and bless us again this evening. We pray for our meeting tonight, that it would be a blessing, that you would prepare our hearts for that as we remember our Lord’s death, His burial, His resurrection and His coming again. We look forward to that day, Father. When He will return and all of the difficulties of this life will be swept away and every tear will be wiped from our eyes and eternal blessing will be ours. Thank you for that day that will come. It’s in the name of Christ we pray these things. Amen.

[Message] Our subject this morning is work, the very thing that you have to go back to tomorrow which ever since Adam men have done for the most part in the sweat of their face. That was particularly so in Paul’s day. For multitudes in the First Century work was hard labor. It was drudgery.

When we think of ancient Greece and Rome, we often think of great philosophers and magnificent art, architectures and great armies, but there was another side to it, one that was less glorious. About 60 years ago the British poet and classical scholar, Louis MacNeice wrote a poem on his thoughts about ancient Greece.

As he reflected on its glories, he wrote, “When I should remember the paragons of Hellas,” paragons of Greece, “I think instead of the crooks, the adventurers, the opportunists, the careless athletes and the fancy boys, the hair-splitters and pedants, the hard-boiled sceptics and the Agora and the noise of the

demagogues and the quacks and the women pouring libations over graves and the trimmers at Delphi and the dummies at Sparta and lastly I think of the slaves.”

Well, that’s basically what our lesson is about this morning. For the most part it concerns slaves. And that was a natural topic for the apostle Paul to take up because there were many slaves in the ancient world. Slavery was such an accepted and widespread institution that the morality of it was really never questioned.

It is estimated that there were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, Paul’s day. One historian writes that there was no action, no belief or institution in Greco-Roman antiquity that was not in one way or another affected by the possibility that someone involved might be a slave.

Two things that the Greek prized above all else was the admiration of his fellow men or fame, particularly for his ability as an athlete. And the other was leisure, freedom from work, time to walk about the marketplace, the Agora and discuss politics, points of law, the latest play or go work out at the gymnasium and keep fit. But without slaves, the conversations in the market or the wrestling at the could not have taken place, leisure would have been impossible.

By the First Century the economy of the Roman Empire was largely built on slavery. Now they occupied all levels of society. Slaves were in the domestic area, domestic servants and laborers as well as doctors, teachers and administrators. Slaves formed almost the entire workforce of the empire.

So they had a certain value, but it wasn’t the value of a person. It was the value of a thing. Slaves were thought to be possessions. They were thought to be things rather than persons. William Barclay quotes from Aristotle that a slave is a living tool just as a tool is an inanimate slave. It was a cruel and a dehumanizing logic, but that was the opinion of the ancient world about slaves.

And yet it was in that world that the church took root. And the gospel was proclaimed to slaves as it was proclaimed to free men. And many slaves came to faith and became a part of the church, not as tools, not as second class members, but as full and equal members, as fellow saints with freemen. Now that’s the power of the gospel. The gospel can take men in that situation and elevate them to the situation and the position that it did.

That’s the power of the gospel that we preach and that Paul talks about in Romans 1. And so because slaves were such a large part of the Roman world and a

significant part of the church, Paul now addresses them and does so within this section that Luther called the *haustafeln*, the house tables or the household codes, the list of rules and duties of the Christian home because many of them were household slaves.

And just as earlier he instructed children to obey their parents, he now instructs slaves to obey their masters. Paul didn't urge them to flee. He didn't make direct protest against the practice of slavery. The New Testament doesn't directly protest the institution of slavery.

Now that doesn't mean that Paul and the apostles endorsed slavery. It simply means that they at best tolerated it. We get a sense, I think, of Paul's opinion on slavery in various passages of the New Testament. One is in 1 Corinthians 7 where he writes in verses 20 and 21, “Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Don't worry about it.” In other words, continue in that condition, don't rebel against it.

“But,” he adds, “if you're able to become free, rather do that.” And slaves in the First Century could do that. They were able in some situations to purchase their freedom or have it purchased for them or have it granted to them. And what Paul is saying is if freedom is a possibility, then by all means take it. Which clearly indicates that Paul saw the cruelty of slavery, the unnaturalness of slavery and advised freedom when it was possible.

But he evidently did not feel that it was his duty to make a direct attack upon it. Paul didn't see his mission, he didn't see the mission of the early church to be one of overthrowing the institutions of society. His mission, as he saw it, the mission of the church was that of calling men and women, slave and free, out of the society of the world and into the new society of the church, calling them to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now he wasn't indifferent to cruelty. Earlier in 5:8-9, he said, “You are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light for the fruit of the light consist in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” So our lives are to be an expression of goodness, and that's goodness of all kinds and goodness that is to be shown to all kinds of people.

In verse 16 of that same chapter he goes on to tell us that we are to be making the most of our time because the days are evil. So we are to be taking every opportunity that is given to us to use for good, to use in a way that will be helpful and

kind to people in difficulty, whether they be slave or free, whatever their circumstances be.

The fact that he addresses slaves here, the fact that they were a part of the church indicates that he considered them to be equal with their masters before the Lord. In fact, in Galatians 3:29, Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither man nor female for all are one in Christ Jesus.” In other words before Christ there isn’t this status of slave and free. We’re equal in His sight.

In fact, there is a specific example of that in Paul’s concern for the Christian slave Onesimus found in the Book of Philemon. Onesimus a runaway slave of the Christian Philemon, his Christian master and Philemon fled or rather Onesimus fled from Philemon and he went to Rome. And there he, by the providence of God, came under the influence of the apostle Paul. And during that time he came to faith in Christ.

And so having become a Christian Paul then sends Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter that bears his name and he writes in that letter that since Onesimus had become a Christian, had come to faith in Christ, when he returns to Philemon he will have him, Paul writes, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother. And then he asked Philemon to accept Onesimus as he would accept him, as he would accept the apostle himself as an equal, as a brother so that he was no longer a slave but that he was a friend. He was a partner in the faith.

And we can assume that Philemon did do just that. That’s why we see in this the power of the gospel. Aristotle, one of the greatest minds of the ancient world considered slaves to be tools and because of that, he felt that it was impossible for a slave and his master to have a friendship. But in Christ Paul says slave and masters are equal before God. They are friends. They are brothers. They are part of God’s family and household.

Christ elevates. Christ breaks down barriers. Christ changes relationships. That’s the power of the gospel. And we see it in the institution of slavery and what occurred as a result of the preaching of the gospel. And that’s what Paul preached. He preached the gospel. He didn’t preach against slavery directly. He didn’t try to change institutions of society.

He preached the gospel, the gospel that changes men’s hearts and in proclaiming it, he let the moral force of the gospel do its work in society and in due course it did change things. In fact, as we look over history, the last century it was mainly efforts of Christian men like Wilberforce and others, John Newton who eventually, through their long, hard labor had such an influence on society that slavery was ended in the nation of Britain.

When the word of God is obeyed by the church and the church becomes vital, becomes very active in doing the things that God has commanded us and simply living as righteous men and women, living quiet lives but obedient lives. When the church is doing that, then it has an inevitable influence on society. But that’s really the byproduct of the gospel. The primary teaching of scripture, the primary teaching of the apostle Paul here in the Book of Ephesians is not to the institutions of society, it’s not the governments, it’s not to the unbelieving world, it is to the church. And he is instructing the church to be righteous, instructing Christians to live righteously in every circumstance of life.

And if that circumstance happens to be slavery, as it was for many in the church, then they were to be the best slaves that they could be. That’s how Paul begins this last part of the household codes, verse 5, “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh.” In other words, obey your earthly masters. The fact that they are masters according to the flesh indicates that the Christian slave’s service only pertains to the temporal affairs of this life to material matters, not to the spiritual. The human masters are not the spiritual masters. They don’t have authority in that area of life.

It’s simply the temporal affairs of life. And the fact that they are masters according to the flesh also suggests that they are only temporary masters. A slave’s slavery is only in this life. In fact, we can apply that to all of the difficult circumstances of life because men and women find themselves in those kinds of circumstances. Maybe a very difficult circumstance at work, you may not like the position you’re in there and see no way out of it. But there is a way out, it is temporary.

And every circumstance in life is temporary and sometimes a test. And it will be replaced by eternal glory someday and we’re to be looking at that. And so the slave’s slavery is only in this life Paul is saying. But in this life where slavery did

exist, slaves were to observe these social distinctions between them and their masters and they were to be diligent in their work. They were to obey, Paul says, with fear and trembling.

In other words, they were to serve their masters with great care and respect. Fear and trembling doesn't mean that they're to act in a servile way, that they were to live in a kind of cringing fear before their masters. This is the same expression that Paul uses in Philippians 2:12 where he exhorts us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Doesn't mean that we are to live before God in cringing fear and terror. We're not to do that at all, in fact, apostle John tells us in 1 John that perfect love cast out fear.

But this is fear in the sense of great reverence and great respect and that's how we are to work out our salvation. In other words, we are to be obedient men and women with great seriousness and see the importance of that, be diligent and careful, living an obedient life and that's what slaves were to do in regard to their particular duties in the household. They were to undertake their responsibilities with great care, do what is right.

Now that had to be difficult for a slave because slavery was a dead end job. It is work without hope and one of the great motivations for labor is hope, the hope of achievement, the hope of advancement, the hope of reward. And there was little to none of that for a slave. His routine was generally dull, dreary and often hard, backbreaking labor. And for those who serve pagan masters, there was the added burden of serving men who were unfair, men who were ungodly and so there was the temptation for a slave, a Christian slave to become bitter, to become disrespectful, to become indifferent, become lazy. And there were probably cases where that occurred and where the witness of the church was tarnished, at least in the unbelieving community.

Could say those Christian slaves were just good for nothing. Got their minds on other things. So Paul gives this instruction. But the same could have happened with a slave who was serving a Christian master. In fact, that might have presented a whole set of different problems, a new understanding of their equality with the master and the familiarity that they no doubt had as they fellowship within the church might have given occasion to feelings of resentment.

They were brothers and yet still slave and master. And that might have been particularly difficult if a slave was a teacher in the church. And that very likely was the case oftentimes because when a man or a woman comes to faith, God gives a spiritual gift or gifts to that individual. We all gifts and those gifts aren't given based upon our status in society. God gives them as He wills.

So when a slave came to faith, it's very likely that many were given gifts of teaching and so you can see the slave and the master coming together on Sunday and the slave beginning to instruct out of the word of God and there the master was sitting at his feet. That was the situation in the church, but then when church came to its end, the service was over and they went back home, the slave resumed his duties there in the home.

And so even when a Christian slave was blessed with a Christian master there, there could have been hard feelings that resulted from that relationship and resulted in a resistance to work. Paul urges slaves to serve with fear and trembling and adds to that insincerity. Serve with genuine service without putting on a show, without hypocrisy. And again, you can imagine how a slave might do his work without any real sincerity. Do his work to get it done but really just be doing it in a way in which he's just going through the motions without any real satisfaction or any desire to do it well.

And that's not serving with sincerity. That's doing one thing and thinking another. Paul says serve in sincerity. And the only way to do that is by the servant realizing that he or she is not really serving ultimately, the master according to the flesh but another master, Christ. Be obedient, Paul says, in sincerity of heart as to Christ. Now that's the key. And that put hope in a slave's service. It was an act of worship. It was an act with eternal value.

And that principle carries over into all labor. It applies to all employees. Slave have masters, employees have employers, supervisors, bosses. Children, wives, husbands have their duties in the household and we are to do them with the same diligence that Paul requires of slaves. And our motivation in doing them with sincerity is our service to Christ. That's who we're ultimately serving and that's to be before our minds as we do our work.

And so John Stott in his commentary writes, “It is possible for the housewife to cook a meal as if Jesus Christ were going to eat it. It is possible for teachers to

educate children, for doctors to treat patients, shop assistants to serve customers, accountants to audit books and secretaries to type letters as if in each case they were serving Jesus Christ.

We sometimes hear about the Protestant or the Puritan work ethic and that expression is oftentimes misunderstood because it's come to have a pejorative meaning. People sometimes associate it with the workaholic, with drudgery or competitiveness, with the worship of success, materialism and the cult of the self-made man. That's a misunderstanding of the Puritans and the early Protestants. They were hardworking people who saw no division between the sacred and the secular.

Now they were influenced by the Reformers in that thinking, men like Martin Luther who overthrew the notion that the priest or the clergymen were engaged in holier work than the shopkeeper or the housewife. Both the Reformers and the Puritans, the early Protestants simply went back to Paul, went back to the apostles on this very point. Every Christian is a minister of Jesus Christ and all work is sacred because we are to do it as unto the Lord and for the general good of mankind.

Now that is the purpose of labor. The goal of work is not wealth and pleasure and leisure. God blesses our work, we get those things. And leisure is a good thing and wealth is good thing. And so is pleasure if it's all used in the right way. But those aren't the ultimate objects of work. It is service. And it is service first to God then to man. And that was the natural conclusion that the early Protestants drew from their emphasis on doctrines, their doctrines of divine election and providence.

One of the greatest of the Puritan theologians was William Perkins who wrote, “God is the general appointing to every man his particular calling.” And what he's saying in that is your job, your employment in this world is not a mistake, it's not something you just happen to have. It fits a purpose; it fits a plan of God who is the general. And so knowing that, that all labor is a calling, knowing that in the eyes of God the shop is as sacred as the sanctuary, that a person's calling may be as a doctor or as a lawyer or as a housewife, a teacher or a bricklayer just as it may be to be a minister or a preacher.

Knowing that, that whatever your position is is God's calling for you, now that should give you a sense of purpose in it and give you a desire to be diligent in it and find contentment and fulfillment in that. It's more than a job, it's a ministry. And so Paul's word to the slave was this is where God has placed you to be His servant, at

least for the time being. And if it's in a Pagan household then that slave was to realize that that was his mission field.

And as Paul told the Corinthian slaves, if they had an opportunity for freedom, then they should take it. It's far better. And what he would say to us is that if you are uncontented in the job that you have now, serve diligently in it and when God opens the door for other ways, then take it and do it. But in the meantime, until that time, serve well your masters according to the flesh. Paul develops this further in verses 6 and 7 and he explains what he means by sincerity of heart or sincere obedience. Obedience, service is not be by way of eyesight he says.

In other words, not working hard only when the master's around and watching, not working hard only when those who can see it and give you some praise for what you're doing. We are to work even when the eyes of others aren't upon us, when nobody sees what we do, when there'll be no opportunity for reward or praise for it. We're to be diligent. That's not easy to do. Human nature is seeking the easiest way out.

And so we face the temptation to work as those who are serving those who see us, not serving diligently when we are not being seen. There are parables that draw on that problem. The parable of the talents is one in Matthew 25. You probably are familiar with that parable, the one about the master who was going on a journey and before he leaves he gives his three servants talents to invest, five talents to one of them, two talents to another and then one talent to the third.

And then he left on his journey. Well, immediately the one with the five talents traded them and gained five more. The second slave did the same and he gained two more, but the third buried his one talent. When the master returned he praised the first two servants with, “Well done, good and faithful slave.” Both had worked hard in his absence and had put their talents to good use. But the third he calls a wicked, lazy slave. That's the Lord's assessment of indolence, of sloth. It's wicked.

We are to be diligent in our work, whether we are being seen by others or not. Our employer may be out of sight, but we are never out of sight. We never out of God's sight. We are always being watched by Him and He is the one that we really are to be serving. Hard work, consistent faithful effort on the job in all of the details

and responsibilities that we are given is a great witness for the faith. The things we do are very important.

If we speak one way and live another, we contradict and we bring disgrace to the gospel. The things we do, the way we live, the way we perform at work is an important witness for Jesus Christ. That’s illustrated in the life of Dr. Harold John Ockenga. I read a story about him just the other day. He is a well-known minister of a few years ago. He was the pastor of the famous Park Street Church in Boston and founding president of both Fuller and Gordon-Conwell Seminary.

Before the Second World War he preached in Poland. And while he was there he was invited to the large estate of a prince. And while there, the prince pointed to a striking young man and he said, “See that young man? He is the best worker on my estate. It’s due to him that I have invited you here today.” They went on to say that he was favorably disposed to a religion that could affect a man’s life as it had affected that man’s life.

That just illustrates the point that the things we do and the way we perform on our jobs and the duties that have been given to us are a ministry to others. Whether it is at the home or whether it’s at the office or whether it’s at school, wherever our responsibilities are, people notice the way we work, the things that we do and how responsible we are. In contrast to eye service and men pleasers is heart service, is doing the will of God from the heart or literally from the soul, the seat of our desires and affections.

Obedience is essentially a matter of the heart. It is essentially a matter of the inner man before it is a matter of outward action. It arises from a desire to do the will of God. And so true obedience is not given grudgingly, at least not that kind of obedience that pleases God. It is not done as though it is some great burden, but it’s to be done with pleasure. It’s to be done with maximum effort. Paul is calling for Christian slaves, for Christian employees, for Christian workers to aim at doing as much as they can do rather than doing as little as they can, seeing how much they can get away with.

That’s God will, to be diligent, to be hard workers. And then in verse 7 Paul sums up the whole character of the slaves’ obedience is to be wholehearted, verse 7, “With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men.” Leon Morris in his commentary translates this slaving with good will as the idea of working cheerfully,

pleasantly. Christians aren't to work with a sullen attitude with a sense of indignation and bitterness. There's nothing very attractive in a negative person, nothing very attractive in a negative, complaining Christian.

There is something very attractive in a pleasant person. That's the way Christians are to be. If anyone had grounds for being sour, if anyone had grounds for complaining and being unhappy, it would have been the slave, but Paul doesn't let that be an excuse. He doesn't allow that; he urges good will. He urges pleasantness and cheerfulness in work.

And again, the reason for that, the motive is Christ, because we serve Him. It's service as to the Lord. Paul keeps coming back to that point. That a slave's service is not primarily to his earthly owner, his earthly master, his earthly employer but his heavenly owner, to God and that is what the Lord is. He is our owner.

1 Corinthians 6, Paul writes, “Do you not know you are not your own for you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.” That is what we are to be doing in all that we do, in every area of our life, wherever we are, we are to be using our bodies to glorify God, to honor Him, the things that we do, the things that we say, the way that we act, so that's what the slave was to be doing, that's what the free man was to be doing.

That's what people are to be doing in dead-end jobs. That's what are to be doing in employment that has all kinds of opportunity. We are to be glorifying God in all that we do through honest, hard work. And it has its reward. The dead-end job has its reward, if not in this life then certainly in the next. Verse 8, “Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”

Now that's intended to be a great encouragement to the slave, to the man or the woman who was in a situation that seemed to be hopeless, for everyone who labors, for that matter, that God sees everything and He rewards every believer who faithfully discharges his or her duty. Now often reward comes in this life. If you are diligent in this life and you are working diligently, very often the reward comes in this life with promotion or with another opportunity for better employment.

It comes in God's time and we need to look to Him for that, trust Him for that. He will open doors and He will exult at the proper time. But it doesn't always come in this life; that's just the reality. Things don't always change the way we want them

to. Sometimes part of life, part of the burden of this life, part of the test of this life is to continue for a long, long time in a very difficult situation. But if it doesn't come in this life, the Lord doesn't reward us in the life, He will certainly reward us in the life to come. And a day is coming when slaves who suffered indignities but labored diligently will be exulted, when good employees who were passed over in promotions or went unnoticed for hard and faithful service will receive their reward.

And the reward that they will receive, the reward that you will receive, it's not a temporary reward. It's not a transient word of praise, it's eternal. It's beyond imagination. So He gives hope with that. Now that's not the reason that the Christian works hard. We don't serve God for what we can get out of it. But still, God promises to reward faithful service.

And it is wise to have that perspective. That's what our Lord encourages in Matthew 6:20 where he said, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven whether neither moth nor rust destroys.” Now that is motivation for good service for pleasant, cheerful service in dreary conditions. And God is just and a rewarder of whatever good thing we do. Notice that, whatever good thing we do. The smallest good thing will not go unnoticed and unrewarded by our Lord.

Things that you have done that you may have forgotten all about in your life, God has not forgotten about those and they will be rewarded. And yet while we can speak of God being just, as a just rewarder in contrast to men who may not be just in their assessment and the things that they do, while He is just, He is also generous. And He is mainly generous because all that we get, all that we have, all that we receive from Him is really of grace.

Because when we have done everything that we should do, still we have only done what we should do, what our duty requires of us so that in the end when we are rewarded, when we are blessed by our Lord, we will say we are unprofitable servants. We have done that which was our duty to do. And nevertheless, God rewards unworthy servants, unprofitable servants. And that should encourage all of us to be faithful and good in the service that we do.

Slaves are to be diligent. They are to be respectful, sincere and pleasant. That's Paul instruction to the slave, but he's not finished. His instruction is not all on one side. It's not just for slaves. He has a word for masters too, verse 9, “And

masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

Now you notice that Paul’s instruction to masters is much briefer than his instruction to slaves and in part that’s because the slave’s lot in life was much more difficult and it called for more instruction. But also everything or most everything that Paul said to the slave applied to the master as well and so they, the masters were to apply that to themselves.

Basically Paul’s point to the masters is the good will that was expected of the slave was to be shown to them as well. If you expect them to behave well toward you, then you are to behave well toward them, particularly in the matter of threatening. He says, “Give that up.” Threatening slaves was a great temptation for slave owners, try to get the most out of the slave by holding over his or her head the threat of punishment and they could punish them very severely.

The rights of the slave were in the hands of the master and the master held the authority, the law over him or her. But just as parents were not to provoke their children, Christian masters were not to threaten their slaves. And again, the significance of the gospel is connected with that. The Christian master has a pagan slave, an unbelieving slave, what kind of witness is that to that man or that woman? And I have this Christian master threatening, being abusive. What kind of witness is it if we own businesses and we are abusive to those whom we employ?

It isn’t a reflection of the grace of God. Isn’t a reflection of what Christ has done for us and becoming our servant. Really, that is to be the attitude of the master. It is to be the attitude of the employer. Ultimately, he is a servant, a servant to the slave, a servant to the employee. And Paul reinforces that by reminding these masters that they have a master in heaven, the Lord. The king of kings is the master of the masters.

He sees all and Paul says, “There is no partiality with Him.” In other words, he is a judge. A slave may not have an advocate or a defender in the law courts of this world, but he did in heaven and an impartial judge, a fair and a just judge. As John Eadie, the old Scottish commentator said, “The gold ring of the master does not attract his eye and it is not averted from the iron fetter of the slave.” Christ is not more impressed with masters than he is with slaves and he required fairness and kindness from masters and employers.

After all, the Lord was a laborer. He knew what it was to rise early and to break a sweat and to get callouses on His hands in the carpenter shop and He is a sympathetic high priest. And He is not pleased with hard, threatening employers and taskmasters. Someday both slave and master, employee and employer will have to give an account before God. Position and status in society means nothing in heaven. Faithfulness, faithfulness to the Lord is what is important.

Our service in whatever area of life we are in, in the marketplace, in the home, in the school, wherever our service is above all things, that service is a response to God. If you see a lazy man in the marketplace, in the workplace, that is a reflection of his or her attitude toward the Lord. Our work, the way we perform is a response to God. It is service to Him and we are to be faithful to Him.

Slaves and masters have their responsibilities. And we look at those two aspects of society, I think we can say that the slaves and masters are the haves and the have nots of this world. But notice the grace of God in all because He takes both and brings them into the family and brings them in as equals. That's the power of the gospel. It includes all kinds of men and the gospel of the grace of God applies to both in their particular circumstances of life.

To the master, the man who had it all, the Lord said, “What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” Think of those ancient Greeks who had slaves and who gained fame and who have leisure. They had it all, but they had it only briefly and eventually their life came to an end and all that they had, and all that they'd enjoyed, they lost forever.

But the man and the woman who valued all of that as nothing in comparison to gaining Christ and gaining their souls, they gained everything in this life and the life to come. Gospel is a message to the masters. It has a message to the man or the woman who has it all and it is: what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and loses his own soul? But it also had a very direct message to the slave, to the man or the woman who had nothing, the man or the woman who was burdened with labor and a life of drudgery, Lord Jesus gave the invitation, come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Gives that rest from the burden and the guilt of sin.

He gives rest and peace with hope in this life, hope that slavery and drudgery and dead-end jobs are a value. And they have eternal value with God. They are

service rendered to Him which He will reward and He gives a promise that someday when those burdens are laid down literally, we enter into eternal rest and eternal peace through Jesus Christ.

Well, that’s the hope that He gives to us. So are you heavy-laden with sin, with guilt? Then look to Christ for rest. Are you a person with wealth, a person who enjoys leisure? Then realize that it can only end someday. It must come to an end. It can only be brief and then you face eternity where money and where position are meaningless. Don’t lose your soul for the passing pleasures of this all too brief world. Look to Christ that died for sinners, who paid the penalty for sin and gained eternal life for everyone who puts their faith in Him.

God does not call us to labor and earn our salvation. Jesus Christ says, “Come to me, take my yoke. That’s all. Trust in me.” And we enter into a life where our burdens are lifted. We are given freedom. We are given life eternal. God help you to do that. May God help each of us to live lives of faithful service because ultimately and most importantly, whatever area of life we are in, it is service and a calling from God. Let’s stand now for the benediction.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for all that you have given us in instruction in this passage of scripture. It in some ways deals with some of the mundane features of life, the very basic aspects of life and yet your gospel applies to all areas of life. It addresses every aspect of life and it tells us that nothing is a mistake, nothing just happens, that there is purpose in every part of life. That our employment, our position in this world has meaning.

There is purpose to it. When we go to work tomorrow morning, we are going not just to place of employment but to a ministry. And the way we perform reflects upon our relationship to you. It reflects upon the gospel. So Father, we pray that you’d make us diligent, that we might be men and women who serve you, who work not for men but for our Lord.

So we pray that you give us energy in an industry. And we recognize, Father, ultimately this must come from you, that this is part of walking by the spirit, this is part of being filled with the spirit. It is the power that you give so we look to you to supply it. Pray that you would do that and make us men and women who desire to work diligently, pleasantly and in a way that brings honor to the name of Jesus Christ who is our savior. It is in His name we pray. Amen.