

God's Household, Part 15: "Instructions to Servants"

1 Timothy 6:1-2

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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

Hello church family and friends! We are working through the book of 1 Timothy, in a sermon series called *God's Household*. Today's sermon is called "Instructions to Servants" and it's from 1 Timothy 6:1-2.

Paul addresses Christian slaves here and this might be a bit shocking, especially such a strong negative view of slavery today (and rightly so). So we have to ask: Does the Bible condone the practice of slavery? Let me read what L.T. Jeyachandran, a Christian apologist, wrote to answer this question.

"While the Bible does not reject slavery outright, the conclusion that it actually favours slavery is patently wrong. Scripture does reveal that slavery is not ideal, both in Old Testament laws forbidding the enslavement of fellow Israelites, the law of jubilee, and in New Testament applications of Christ. In fact, the Bible teaches that the feeling of superiority in general is sin (Philippians 2:1-8)! The abolition of slavery is thus not only permissible by biblical standards, but demanded by biblical principles. The pre-fall statement that should guide and ultimately abolish such practices of superiority is the declaration that all humans- men and women- are made in the image of God." – L.T. Jeyachandran

To summarize, the Bible upholds that all people are made in God's image, equal in value before God. Slavery is a real part of our fallen world and is against God's heart as revealed in the whole counsel of the Scriptures.

I need to also explain slavery in first century Roman society, which was the time period that 1 Timothy was written. In Roman slavery, slaves were still considered property but it was not a lifelong fate. In most cases, there was an agreement for the "master" or "patron" to help a slave with debt- so there would be a legal agreement (this was called a "bond"): the patron would pay the debt in exchange for certain amount of years of service from the slave. Slaves could sometimes be freed after the debt was repaid, or they could choose to still work for their masters.

This wasn't just for the unfortunate people who fell behind in their payments, but for able-bodied people who looked for patrons who could pay for labor. Slaves in cities like Ephesus were entrusted to work in their masters' households and businesses, managed finances and other people, often lived in different parts of the city, and might have been educated or of a higher social class.

In this way, this is not too different than an employment contract that we would see today in the working world. So while this passage of Scripture uses the words "slave" and "master," we are going to mostly talk about the area of work and other areas of serving others.

Paul's purpose in today's passage of Scripture was not to address the morality of slavery, but to give instruction to slaves about how to live out their faith as followers of Jesus Christ now.

Scripture Reading

Paul wrote this letter to his disciple Timothy as he served as a pastor of the church in Ephesus. In this section of the letter from 4:6-6:2, Timothy was exhorted to be a good servant of Christ and to train the church for godliness (4:6-16), especially to the spiritual family as a whole (5:1-2), widows (5:3-16) and elders (5:17-25). Now we get to 1 Timothy 6:1-2. This is God's Word...

1 Timothy 6:1-2 (ESV):

1 Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. 2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things.

Amen!

Prayer

Before we go any further, let's pray and ask again for God's grace in this ministry of his Word.

Heavenly Father, in this moment of preaching your holy words, may you anoint my lips so that your message are communicated clearly, faithfully, and powerfully. We be pointed to the truth and glory of your Son Jesus Christ at this time. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Proposition

Here's the "one thing" from 1 Timothy 6:1-2- the main message for us from this passage of Scripture:

***Honor those we are called to serve
as a way to honor God himself.***

Organizational Statement

I'll share three instructions that Paul gave in this passage of Scripture and a timeless principle from each instruction that connects to us today.

→ **Transition:** So let's go the first main point now!

Sermon Outline

I. Here's the first instruction that Paul gave in verse 1:

A. Christian slaves must regard their masters as worthy of all honor (1).

1 Timothy 6:1 (ESV): *1 Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.*

1. Principle #1 from this verse is this: We treat people with honor ultimately because we want to uphold God's name.
 - a) Verse 1 indicates that there were slaves who were part of the church in Ephesus- probably reflecting Roman society at the time and thus a significant amount. Thus, the issue that arose within the church there was like this: "As a slave in the Roman empire, but as a child of God by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a citizen of God's Kingdom, how am I supposed to approach my work and my relationship with my master or patron?" It seemed like there were some Christian slaves that were wrongfully influenced or persuaded to treat their patrons contemptuously and to neglect their work because of their new status in Christ.

- b) Let's look at verse 1 again: Paul instructed Timothy and the church to *regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled*. Paul wrote that what was at stake at how these Christian slaves worked was the "name of God" and also the "teaching." There was the very real threat of Christians in Roman society getting a bad reputation. Some of it was misunderstandings- like thinking that Christians were cannibals who ate the flesh and drank the blood of each other (this was a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper). But some of it was their own fault- like Christian slaves not working hard and being in conflict with their masters.
- c) Paul had already taught this to the church in Ephesus (Ephesians was written in A.D. 62, 1 Timothy was written sometime in the mid-60's). So a few years earlier he wrote this in Ephesians 5:5-7.
 - o Ephesians 5:5-7 (NLT): *5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. 6 Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. 7 Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*

Notice what Paul wrote here: they were to obey with respect and fear as if they were serving Christ, to please God. So this "honor" that they were supposed to give to their masters wasn't with mere lip service, but in their hearts because they wanted to honor God and make sure that they honored his name in the eyes of the world. When we say something like "hallowed be your name" in the Lord's prayer, we must ask ourselves: "Should not God's honor and reputation really motivate me, that I represent God in my work and every area of my life?" It usually bothers us in big scandals that get on the news, but it also matters in the daily, mundane ways of our own lives!

- d) Context: Now don't mistake me here- this doesn't mean that we can only honor God when we are perfect and successful. Actually, the good news is that everything Christians do can glorify God. When we do perform with excellence, experience success, and conduct ourselves well, other people do take notice of it and glorify God. But even when we make mistakes, get into conflicts, and struggle with our limitations, we can also honor God by confessing our sin, resolving conflicts humbly, and being totally dependent upon God for the results. This kind of authenticity and transparency takes courage, but we treat people with honor ultimately because we want to uphold God's name.
- e) I can see another great temptation here: there seemed to be an incorrect understanding of "spiritual" and "secular" as people often have now. Maybe it was the influence of false teachers or maybe it was the misguided sinfulness in their own hearts (or probably a combination of both). But it seemed that there was an attitude shift not only in how these Christian slaves viewed their masters, but also how they viewed their work. Perhaps the so-called "spiritual" stuff of life was wrongly categorized as more important, while the so-called "secular" stuff of life was not- so they were tempted to neglect their work or not do their work with excellence.
- f) Example: Looking back when I was a college student, this was a really big mistake that I made. By God's grace, I grew to love Jesus: trying to spend a lot of time reading and studying the Bible, praying alone and with others, singing worship songs on guitar, spending lots of time with LIFE group people sharing and hanging out, going to weekly services on Fridays and Sundays, even talking to people on campus about Jesus- all the "spiritual stuff" that I thought was important. But I wasn't that excited about what I regarded as "secular" stuff: going to class, doing homework, working on projects with classmates, and studying. I'm embarrassed to say that I was a terrible student those first few years! And the reason for that was I made the mistake of thinking that the "secular" work I did as a student was not as important as "spiritual" activities as a

Christian. But in reality, this was an excuse for being sinfully lazy, disengaged, and unfaithful!

- g) Remember from our “Worship” sermon series that our worship of God encompasses “all of life”? So the truth is that God cares about our work! Our worship is expressed in the work we do, our attitudes and motivations behind work, our conduct and diligence in working, AND the way we treat people as we work. There is no distinction between “sacred” and “secular”- all of life is worship to God, upholding the name of God and the teaching of the Scriptures of what God’s will is for our work. To learn more about the Biblical theology of work, we always recommend *Every Good Endeavor* by Tim Keller. Also, if you want to access resources and testimonies of this, some friends of ours have two helpful websites: www.faithdrivenentrepreneur.org and www.faithdriveninvestor.org.

→ **Transition:** So that was Paul’s first instruction as we are to *honor those we are called to serve as a way to honor God himself*. Now let’s go to our second main point.

Sermon Outline (continued)

II. Here’s the second instruction that Paul gave in verse 2a:

A. Christian slaves must not be disrespectful of their Christian masters (2a).

1 Timothy 6:2a (ESV): *2a Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers...*

1. Principle #2 from this verse is this: We treat fellow Christians with even more respect because they are spiritual family.
 - a) The first instruction for Christian slaves was with respect to those with non-believing masters. This second instruction was for Christian slaves with respect to Christian masters now. As I mentioned before, there were many slaves in the Ephesian church; but there were also masters in the Ephesian church too- it was diverse in terms of social class. So here they were: slaves who were set free from their spiritual bondage by Jesus and now brothers and sisters in Christ with those they were in financial bondage to- this was an awkward situation!
 - b) These Christian slaves in the Ephesian church faced a difficult shift in relationship with their masters: they were now brothers and sisters in Christ. They interacted with each other not just in the master’s business, but also in church gatherings. It’s not hard to imagine the relational tensions as work and church lives collided. So, there is good reason why Paul commanded these Christian slaves in verse 2 not to be “disrespectful” of their believing masters.
 - c) Illustration: People always tell me that the hardest thing about working for the family business is that work and family lives collide and causes great tensions. Family issues get dragged into the office and make meetings and dynamics in the office very awkward. It’s hard to respect parents, siblings, or children in the same way employees do because we’re used to interacting with them at home. Or you feel that you are not treated professionally by your family members at the office. Additionally, work issues get dragged into the home too: family meals are dominated by conversations about work; there are no boundaries in the evenings and on weekends; and workplace issues become very personal. Sometimes it gets so bad that people have to leave the family business just so they can preserve their relationships with their family members.

- d) I would imagine it was the same tension that happened between slaves and masters in the Ephesian church. Work issues- conflicts, politics, ongoing projects, questions- got dragged into church gatherings and made worshiping together really uncomfortable. Maybe it was hard for masters and slaves to eat at the same communion table and to share vulnerably and openly about personal issues. Maybe slaves tried to take advantage of this new brotherhood with their masters and expected favoritism at work, undeserved higher wages, or lower expectations for their output.
- e) Context: As we get to know one another better as a spiritual family, it often gets harder to love, serve, and respect one another- especially as more and more areas of life overlap. This was one of the main reasons why Paul was writing this letter to Timothy and the Ephesian church!
 - o 1 Timothy 3:15 (NLT): *...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*

Now that they were all part of God's household- spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ- they were to know how to live this out in this very practical area of working life.

- f) Context: Here's something that we can't miss out on as we think about when areas of our lives overlap with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Fellow Christians can disciple one another in all areas of life, including- but not limited to- work! I know, I know- it always starts as a great idea for people from church to work in the same business or organization together, do ministry together, become roommates, or even get married and become parents together. It is a great thing! But sooner or later it will not *feel* that great because inevitably it gets very messy as we see uglier sides of each other that we didn't know about before when people were more casual friends. Now, we notice other our brother or sister in Christ's bad habits, laziness, pettiness, competitiveness, and obsessiveness. But this can also be a great opportunity to help each other more deeply integrate our faith- based on the biblical Gospel and sound doctrine- into these areas of our lives. In the area of work, brothers and sisters in Christ can sharpen each other in how they manage people, run meetings, make decisions, create corporate culture, and handle stress. Even more, they can pray for each other and share vulnerably the deeper parts of their hearts. It can be a tremendous blessing!
- g) Context: Now here's a really tough question for us to consider: "What do I do if my boss or colleague is a Christian but does not live out his faith at work consistently?" A broader question is, "What if my boss or colleague is someone who is not respectable- either Christian or not- because of his lack of character or competence?" In these situations, I know that it's really hard to respect these kinds of people. But I would say that the reason we honor or respect those in positions of authority is not because they are honorable or respectable- this command is not conditional, like "honor your boss only if he is worthy of it, for those who are not worthy, you can treat like garbage." The reason- as we talked about in the first point- is because this area of your life, as a ministry unto God first and foremost, is a way to honor God and uphold his name.
- h) Context: The truth is no other master is worthy of *all* honor (in other words, we can always find reasons that others are not). We have to remember that no authority figure is perfect and that they all have room to grow- but this is how you serve them for their sake! Apart from the grace of God at work in a person, this would be impossible; but in Christ, we can treat fellow Christians with even more respect because they are spiritual family. We'll see how this is possible in the final instruction.

→ **Transition**: But for now, we just covered Paul's second instruction as we are to *honor those we are called to serve as a way to honor God himself*. Now let's go to the third main part.

Sermon Outline (continued)

III. Here's the third instruction that Paul gave in verse 2b:

A. Christian slaves are to serve their Christian masters all the better (2b).

1 Timothy 6:2b (ESV): *2b ...rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things.*

1. Principle #3 from this verse is this: We serve others- especially fellow Christians- in order to benefit them in Christ.
 - a) Continuing his train of thought, Paul wrote that Christian slaves were to *serve all the better* their Christian masters because they are fellow *believers* and also *beloved*. Basically, Paul was saying, "Remember that you are spiritual family- real, true spiritual family! You are beloved by God and saved by God's grace. And don't forget that your master is also beloved by God and saved by God's grace. It will honor me as you honor your master."
 - b) As we've discussed in previous points, this is very hard- I'd actually say it's impossible- for us to do this on our own as human beings. Reviewing a little, while we know it's good for us to treat people with honor ultimately because we want to uphold God's name, the reality is that we are often NOT motivated by God's honor and reputation. So we'll hold onto our feelings of contempt towards people or we'll dichotomize our lives so that we can justify unfaithfulness, selfishness, or laziness. And while we know it's good for us to treat fellow Christians with even more respect because they are spiritual family, the reality is that there are plenty of reasons to be judgmental or to avoid the awkward or difficult discipleship process with each other.
 - c) This is why we need Christ! Jesus was not only a good model of serving people who were not worthy of being served; his service to us is what gives us hope to change. In Philippians 2:6-8, Paul wrote that even though Jesus Christ is God, he emptied himself of all the honor that he was truly worthy of, and took on the identity of a servant. He served God in his obedience to complete God's plan to save people; he served all of humanity by going to the cross to die for our sins in our place. This service rendered by Jesus is what makes us in right standing with God now and forever; this service rendered by Jesus is what gives us hope to be sanctified (that is, progressively changed to please God in our earthly bodies) and then glorified (that is, perfectly changed in our final, resurrected bodies).
 - d) Therefore, they were to *serve all the better* because they wanted to *benefit* their Christian masters *by their good service*. The word "benefit" here is an interesting choice of words for Paul: by the good service of the Christian slave, they would actually be the *benefactor* to their Christian masters- which was ironic, because in the world's economy, the master was the benefactor and the slave was the blessed recipient. But now in light of Christ, the slave could be the *benefactor*- by his good and faithful service- to the master who was the blessed recipient.
 - e) Jesus actually said that this was what his Kingdom was like- it would flip upside down the order of "greatness"! This is what Jesus said in Luke 22:25-27:
 - o Luke 22:25-27 (ESV): *25 And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. 27 For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.*

Jesus said that he was the one who served his disciples. As they were served by Jesus, they could serve and point others- non-Christians AND fellow Christians- to Jesus. Servanthood was such a fundamental part of their identities as disciples of Jesus because that's how their Lord's Kingdom functioned: the greatest willingly become the least and the leader serves.

- f) In the Ephesian church, Christian slaves could actually live out this truth regarding God's Kingdom by also benefiting their masters by serving them well in all aspects! What great beauty this had the potential to be! These slaves, as were being served by Christ, could also serve and be a great benefit to their masters. This was a win-win because their masters' well-being meant their well-being and God being glorified; their masters' success meant God being glorified through their collective good work.
- g) Context: Nickey, Emanuel, and I were doing part of our Bible reading through Daniel and I saw this principle when we read Daniel 6 ("We serve others- especially fellow Christians- in order to benefit them in Christ"). Daniel was exiled as a young man to Babylon, where he began his career as an advisor for several kings' reigns. He was technically a slave- brought against his will from his hometown Jerusalem and forced into servitude. He was smart and sharp so he excelled in all the sciences, literature, and politics of the ancient civilizations of Babylon and Persia. In Daniel 6, which was towards the end of his life, he was one of three high officials serving directly under Darius, king of Persia.
- h) Context: When he was falsely accused of rebelling against the king and thrown into a lion's den, it was Darius who grieved the most because of Daniel's great value to the king- he couldn't sleep or eat that entire night that Daniel spent in the lion's den. When the Lord rescued Daniel, Darius declared this:
 - o Daniel 6:26-27 (ESV): *26 For he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. 27 He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth...*

The theological depth and clarity of this declaration- by a pagan king nonetheless- is utterly amazing! Daniel, as a servant, was a great witness to Darius. Daniel- actually living within God's Kingdom- was truly the benefactor to the one he served.

- i) Context: The implications for this in the realm of our work are great! As you are constantly served by Jesus Christ, you can now serve your company or organization all the better! You can strive to excel; you can help others around you excel; you can sharpen and keep each other accountable towards your shared, collective goal; you can handle difficult situations and people with grace; you can be praying for God's grace over your company or organization; you can persist even through difficult seasons; you can point those around you- non-Christian or Christian- to Jesus Christ who serves you and also who serves THEM too.

→ **Transition**: This was Paul's third and final instruction as we are to *honor those we are called to serve as a way to honor God himself*. Now let's move on to the next steps the Lord wants us to take in light of this Scripture.

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

- A. Here is the "life application" from 1 Timothy 6:1-2 as we *honor those we are called to serve as a way to honor God himself*. These are reflection questions that you need to wrestle with.

1. In what ways is it hard for me to honor certain people in my life (especially at work)?
What attitudes and actions do I need to repent about?
 - a) Let God's Word convict you of the heart attitudes and desires that motivate us to respond to people in the ways that we do. Let's admit where we fall short and confess those things to the Lord Jesus- it's an opportunity to experience his grace and mercy in fresh ways!
 2. In what ways do I need to change how I treat people in my life (especially at work)? How do I preach the Gospel to myself in light of serving people well?
 - a) Specifically, we can preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus serving us by going to the cross- serving us by dying and serving us continually in our lives with the power to be sanctified in our lifetimes. Let's put our faith in Jesus in the way we treat people that we are called to serve in our lives- at work, school, home, or church- as a way to honor God himself!
- **Transition:** At this time we'll transition back to our live Zoom gathering to respond together to God's Word.