

Ephesians 6:5-9
Slaves, Obey (Be Like a Child)

Main idea: God calls us all to serve Him wholeheartedly, no matter what situation you find yourself in.

From the outset of my sermon today, I should emphasize that slavery is a horrible thing.¹

- The slavery that we've seen in much of history and even in the world today is horrible. [graph]
 - In the United States & Western Europe, victims are trafficked into cities for sex work or agricultural labor, often under threats and false promises.
 - In Africa and South Asia, children are forced to work in factories.
 - In China and North Korea, there are forced labor camps where their own citizens live in inhumane conditions, forced to work long days with little if any pay.
- Similarly, like today, Paul was writing to a world where slavery was a common reality.
 - And yet, the gospel transforms how we live, even in the hardest situations.²
 - In whatever place you find yourself, serve the Lord faithfully.³

Read Ephesians 6:5-9

In the Greco-Roman world, unwanted infants were sometimes left outside to die (a practice called exposure).

- In a letter to his wife, a Roman soldier in 1 BC wrote about this. [quote]⁴
- Early Christians became known for rescuing those children, showing their value in God's family.
- Around 155 AD, the Christian Justin Martyr wrote this. [quote]⁵
- In writing this, Justin Martyr was both showing how Christians valued children in the early church, and also condemned the practice of sex slavery.

I bring this up because in our passage today, it's interesting that slaves were given the same command as children. They were to obey. (v. 5-6)

- In that culture, slaves were often treated as property, not people.⁶
- But Paul addresses them directly in the same household code as wives, husbands, and children.
 - This shows that in Christ's family, slaves were not invisible, and they were not to be seen as lesser: they were to be recognized as brothers and sisters in Christ with spiritual dignity.⁷
 - Just as children belonged in the household of faith, so did slaves; all are equal under one Lord.⁸
- And notice that slaves were to obey in a certain way: with fear and trembling.
- Interestingly, this phrase is only used with a command one other time in the Bible.⁹ [Philippians 2:12]
 - This means we're to live with reverence before God and wholehearted devotion.¹⁰
 - Obedience is not about eye-service (only when being watched), but about serving Christ.¹¹

¹ Exodus 22:21

² Philippians 4:13

³ Colossians 3:23

⁴ "If you happen to be pregnant again, if it is a boy, leave it; if it is a girl, throw it out." -Hilarion

⁵ "It is wicked to expose newly-born children, for we would then be murderers of them; and not only does the exposure of the newly-born lead to the deaths of many, but sometimes to prostitution as well, as they are picked up to be raised for shameful purposes."

⁶ The Bible was always counter-cultural on this issue. Exodus 23:9, Colossians 4:1

⁷ The letter to Philemon is a great example of this.

⁸ Ephesians 2:19

⁹ The phrase is used elsewhere describing various things people did with fear and trembling (Mark 5:33, 1 Corinthians 2:3, 2 Corinthians 7:15, etc), but it's only used in connection with a command one other time.

¹⁰ Mark 12:30

¹¹ Colossians 3:17

- Christians should be known as the most faithful, most diligent, honest workers, not because the boss is watching, but because we serve the Lord Jesus.¹²

And because we're primarily serving Jesus, we should have a heart of service. (v. 7)

- Many employees today engage in what's called "productivity theater." [\[graph\]](#)
- Many slaves when Paul wrote Ephesians hired themselves out because they had nowhere else to go.¹³
 - It was much more like a hired servant situation. That's what Paul is addressing in this passage.
 - When you hire yourself out, serve wholeheartedly.
 - When you get a job, and work for a boss, do your job well.
 - When you're in school, do your very best, not for the grade, but for Jesus.
- Paul is saying that in whatever situation you find yourself, wholeheartedly serve the Lord.

Because there are great rewards as we serve God! (v. 8)

- God sees and rewards faithful service, even when earthly masters or employers don't. [\[Matthew 6:4\]](#)
- Even when your work feels unnoticed, God never misses a single act of faithfulness.¹⁴
 - Some of those rewards will be external. If we do a good job, we often receive some kind of blessing from it.¹⁵
 - But some of those rewards will be internal. Even if we seem to get nothing from our obedience, we have joy as we do what God made us to do.¹⁶
 - Doing what's right is like planting seeds. At first it feels small and hidden, but joy comes when you see it grow into something good. [\[video\]](#)

And this goes for all of us, because we all have the same Master. (v. 9)

- So Paul leveled the ground here: both slave and master serve the same Lord.
- It's not saying that slaves should remain slaves and be put in their place. Paul elsewhere said that it's good for slaves to become free. [\[1 Corinthians 7:21\]](#)
- Instead, it's pointing out that in all our interactions, we should seek to please God, because He's our authority.¹⁷

You know, many people criticize the Bible for not condemning slavery enough, but it actually does. [\[Exodus 21:16\]](#) [\[Deuteronomy 24:7\]](#) [\[Jeremiah 22:13\]](#) [\[1 Timothy 1:10\]](#)

- And yet, it also addresses the reality that there were slaves, both by force and by choice. [\[Leviticus 25:39-43\]](#) [\[Joshua 16:10\]](#) [\[Exodus 22:21\]](#)
- So Paul calls believers to live faithfully in the place they find themselves, while also affirming that freedom is good if it is possible. [\[1 Corinthians 7:21-23\]](#)
- The gospel ultimately undermines slavery, because in Christ all are equal. [\[Galatians 3:28\]](#)
- God calls us all to serve Him wholeheartedly, no matter what situation you find yourself in.

¹² Colossians 3:22

¹³ Leviticus 25:39-40

¹⁴ Hebrews 6:10

¹⁵ Proverbs 16:3, Psalm 94:14, James 1:12

¹⁶ Philippians 4:4, Psalm 37:4

¹⁷ Galatians 1:10